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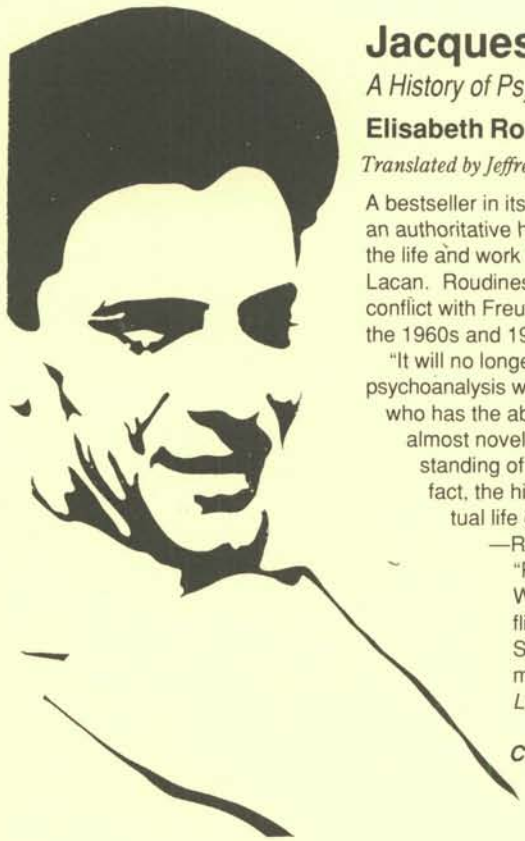

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IS RELIGION JUST FOR THE IGNORANT?

In many intellectual circles the myth still circulates that religion is the preserve of the dim-witted and unlettered. Yet, recently *The New York Times Magazine* carried an article on the "return to religion" among intellectuals. From Harvard to Berkeley, and amid inquisitive people generally, there's an undeniable renewal of interest in the questions traditional religion raises and seeks to answer. This fascination is largely a result of the failures of secular substitutes for religion (such as rationalism, narcissism, technological utopianism, aestheticism, and extremist political ideologies) to give abidingly satisfying answers to the truly significant puzzles in life: goodness, suffering, love, death, and the meaning of it all.

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Life and Letters . . . . . .

Livestock

ARISTIDES

"My young friend," Aldous Huxley once instructed an aspiring novelist, "if you want to be a psychological novelist and write about human beings, the best thing you can do is keep a pair of cats." Whether this is good advice or not I do not know, but for me, a simple if more than occasionally pretentious essayist, one cat has done nicely. In recent years I have spent more time in the company of such a creature than I have with any human being, and, speaking for myself and not the creature in question, I find that it has its subtle compensations. It took me a long while to understand that a cat is the animal best suited to my talent and temperament. Since I have shown no talent whatsoever for training either children or dogs, having a cat, which is by nature intractable, has been a great relief. As for temperament, my cat and I share a penchant for being left alone for long stretches; neither of us is overly demonstrative in our emotions; and we are both quite good at gaining attention when we need it. Before leaving the matters of talent and temperament, I should add that cats generally tend to be cleaner, better athletes, and on the whole better suited for the contemplative life than I.

I realize that owning up to a serious admiration for cats puts me in slightly odd company. Whenever I take my own cat to the veterinarian, at a place called The Chicago Cat Clinic, I feel myself in a somewhat unusual crowd. I will not be more specific than to say that, as a group, my fellow cat lovers show marked differences from the regular Sunday afternoon National Football League audience. Yet the admiration of cats does have a lengthy literary lineage. Ever since Montaigne struck off his famous sentence about his cat—"When I play with my cat who knows whether she diverts herself with me, or I with her!"—the link between literary men and women and cats has been forged. It has been notably strong in France. From Montaigne through Chateaubriand through Sainte-Beuve through Huysmans through Colette—ailurophiles all—cats have been on the scene to note some interesting literary composition. The literary history of France, it has been said, could be written through the nation's cat lovers.

They order these things differently in England. The English are most famously keen on dogs. Of all creatures great and small, to coin a phrase, the English seem most partial to their dogs. The pleasures of a small garden, the companionship of a dog, and most Englishmen, at least of recent past generations, felt life paradise enow. To gain some flavor of the English love of dogs, I have just read for the first time the English writer J. R. Ackerley's *My Dog Tulip*, his account of life with his Alsatian bitch hound, a book that has long had the status of "one of the greatest masterpieces of animal literature," according to Christopher Isherwood. It does not have that status with me; much too much talk in it for my taste of micturition, defecation, impregnation, gestation, and parturition. Ackerley really wallows in all this, can't seem to write enough about it, but when he isn't doing so he does make vivid some of the strange enchantment that animals have for us, if not necessarily we for them. "How wonderful to have had an animal come to one to communicate where no communication is," he writes, "over the incommunicability of no common speech, to ask a personal favor." It is exactly so; and so, too, that "the only way to avoid the onus of responsibility for the lives of animals is never to traffic in them at all." This many of us cannot bring ourselves to do.

To avoid all such traffic is the perhaps sensible policy of the majority of men and women. With what cheerful disdain they are

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able to look upon those of us who have chosen to share our lives with animals. Gazing out a sixth-story window upon an ice-laden street on a below-zero morning at a shivering man waiting for a small Yorkshire terrier to do what is euphemistically called its "business" fills one with a reassuring sense of one's own prudence and the comic imbecility of advanced civilization. I have been both the man with that dog and the man in the window, and, while I can testify that life is more comfortable behind the window, I do not in retrospect regret my mornings with that Yorkshire terrier.

My only regret in this line has to do with another terrier I once owned, this one a wirehair, Sigmund by name, an affable fellow who one otherwise sunny afternoon was struck by a passing car. Great damage was done to the dog's leg. Many X rays were required and no fewer than three operations and resettings of a pathetic cast that made a heartrending sound upon wooden floors. Expenses piled up; I have blocked the figures from my mind. A non-animal-owning friend with a cruel sense of humor suggested that there was a good man in Zurich to whom I ought to send the dog. After a lengthy and costly convalescence, Sigmund, I am pleased to report, regained full use of his injured leg—sufficient use, I am less pleased to report, to run away, permanently and without so much as a by-your-leave. Farewell, ungrateful voyager.

I neglected to mention Sigmund's perfidious behavior to the Warden of an Oxford college who one night, awash with champagne, launched into a powerful and unrelenting attack on dogs in general. "So sycophantic," he exclaimed, "so hopelessly uncritical. Nothing more odious than a large dog, its tongue extended, drooling for its master's or anyone else's attention. Pathetic creatures, dogs, the playthings of those men and women who wish unqualified admiration and derive contentment from acting the part of lord over an ignorant, generally slobbering beast." On and on he went, warming to his subject with increasing intensity, so that toward the end of his tirade ownership of a dog seemed roughly comparable to membership in the Nazi party through the war years. A dog owner myself at the time—the aforementioned Yorkshire terrier, named Max, was then in my possession—I felt I must at least bring this up, if not offer a full defense of dogs.

"Before you go further," I said, "I must report to you that I myself own a dog. He is a very small dog, true, but I am much enamored of him."

"Is he old?" the Warden inquired through a champagne lisp.

"Nine years old."

"I see," said the Warden. "My advice is to keep him till he dies. But, pray, do not replace him."

As it happens, I never did. In the fullness of time—and not so full as all that—the charming and beloved Max departed the scene. We later moved to an apartment where dogs were not permitted. Below-zero mornings I remained smugly indoors; returning late at night I felt a distinct relief at not having to brave the dark neighborhood streets. For a longish period I settled in without the company of animals. Without livestock, I won't say it was the good life, but it was a less-encumbered, a much simpler life, than I had become accustomed to.

Evidently I cannot stand too much simplicity. With children grown and gone, the element of tumult and even human traffic much diminished from daily life, I must have felt the want of a little additional complication. I began to notice myself considering other people's pets admiringly. A relative in San Francisco with whom I visited had a cat of such sweet temper, playfulness, and courtesy that I determined that I should begin to look for a cat of my own.

"A cat," said Edith Wharton, who all her adult life kept highbred small dogs, "is a snake in furs." Many people—technically known as ailurophobes—feel likewise. I never did, but I was for many years, given a choice, partial to dogs. Cats, though, have much to recommend them, especially for city living. A cat does not need to be walked; a cat is the only domestic animal I know who toilet trains itself and does a damned impressive job of it. A cat's requirement for attention is of an utterly different order than that of a dog. My cat seems to like my company but does nicely without my conversation. As I write, for example, she is asleep on my desk, atop correspondence I am late in answering and behind a small stack of books. Apart from her dubious value as a paperweight, I like her company, too, when she chooses to give it, though why it pleases me—no, make that comforts me—to have this sleeping creature on my desk is itself a mildly interesting question.

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Before going any further, before I begin to give the false impression of vast sensitivity to all forms of animal life, I had better make it quite clear that you are a long way from reading an urbanized, Jewish, modern-day St. Francis. Many are the animals I wish had never made the ark. I have never met a rodent I liked; and rats drive me, as they did George Orwell, nearly ill with revulsion. Slobbering dogs are not my idea of a good time, either; I cannot see a Doberman pinscher without thinking of the gestapo; and Pekingese, of the kind that appear in several of Evelyn Waugh's novels, always suggest to me the possibility of furious nips at the back of one's ankles. Rabbits I can take or leave alone. Birds cannot be topped aesthetically, but I have never longed to own an aviary. Snakes I do not despise, though I much prefer them out of the grass and in zoos. Giraffes and penguins I adore for their lovely, elegant oddity. Monkeys and apes come too close to home.

Everyone can put together a similar list of zoological sympathies and antipathies—love iguanas, hate gophers—but some among us believe in something akin to a special, I hesitate to say mystical, perhaps the best word is romantic, relationship with animals, or at any rate with one animal. Sentimental, even sappy though I know this to be, I fear that, however tenuously, I myself hold this belief. In my case, I think it derives from a strong diet when young of animal movies and literature combined with an absence of any opportunity during these same years to live in a natural way with animals.

Walt Disney, with his fine anthropomorphizing hand, started me off nicely with Bambi, Dumbo, Jiminy Cricket, and other animal adorables now lost to memory. In the short subjects then known as serials, I recall being much taken with the high intelligence of Rin Tin Tin. The Lassie movies—*Lassie Come Home* and others—were even more affecting, for a collie, to a child's moviegoing eye, is incontestably more beautiful than a German shepherd. And the horses, the splendid, muscular, many-hued horses: my friend Flicka, Black Beauty, the dazzling palominos, the dangerous white stallions, the frisky pinto ponies, almost all of them ready to answer to the right human whistle, to count with their hooves, to gallop empty-saddled to the nearest town to bring back help.

Sabu, the Indian boy who could communicate perfectly with elephants, fed the belief not only in friendship between human and animal, but in their near-perfect understanding, given sufficient patience and kindness on the part of the human. This was greatly reinforced by the ever-ineloquent Tarzan, whose own unmelodious diction and brutish syntax, it occurs to me now, may have been formed by too much converse with apes, elephants, and other jungle denizens. Perhaps the only movie of my youth containing a heavy dose of truth about the relationship between man and beast was *The Yearling*, made from Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's novel, about the sad consequences of a boy who, through love, wishes to domesticate a creature meant to live in nature.

It would be nice to be able to report that I have gotten over my infatuation with this sort of fare, but, alas, it is not so. Another boy and horse movie, this one titled *The Black Stallion* (1979), did it to me again. The movie contains a roughly twenty-minute sequence of an eight- or nine-year-old boy riding upon the bare back of a Leonardoesque black horse plunging powerfully through the azure waters of the Mediterranean, lushly filmed from all possible angles, which I can only say, not very analytically, sends me each time I see it; and, owing to cassette tape, I have seen it four or five times. I gulp, I gush, I am a goner.

Perhaps only a city kid could fall so hard. In the solidly middle-class neighborhood in Chicago where I grew up, I have no recollection of any neighbors with dogs or cats, or scarcely any remembrance of animal life at all. World War II was on. It may well be that, with a scarcity of apartments, our building and those around it did not permit pets. Food was rationed, and meat for dogs and cats was not readily available. I was sent off to an expensive summer camp in Wisconsin when I was eight, but, owing to the war, we were told that the camp had had to cancel horseback riding. Meanwhile, all those movies, along with a fair amount of reading, stoked my untested regard for the companionship of living, non-human creatures. Pathetic to report, even grasshoppers interested me, and I tried to keep a few alive in a jar with a perforated top. I don't think I went so far as to name them; at least I hope I didn't.

When we finally acquired a pet, a dog, it seemed to come too late. We had moved to more spacious quarters, I was well into my

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adolescence, and the once powerful fantasy of an abiding friendship with an animal could not compete with rivaling fantasies about sports and girls. It was the early 1950s, and our dog was the popular dog of its day, a cocker spaniel. Cocker spaniels came in three colors, black, tan, and auburn, and were usually named, with extraordinarily unimaginative repetitiveness, respectively, Inky, Taffy, and Rusty. Ours was a Rusty. He wasn't a puppy but five or six years old when we acquired him. Whatever the animal equivalent to personality is, Rusty's, near as I could make out, was singularly without interesting idiosyncrasy. A dull guy, Rusty. He was rather sniffy about food, and my mother, who had hitherto evinced no special sympathy for animals, cooked for the dog. The aroma of veal and hamburger sizzling in a heavy black skillet returns to me now; it and other viands were set before him. The result was a diet too rich for his system, and it threw off his toilet training habits. This vastly limited Rusty's tenure with Swiss Family Aristides. In less than a year's time he was farmed out to the man who picked up and delivered our laundry, who lived in the country with a family of ten children. I hope Rusty lived out his days in dull contentment, but "Rusty come home" was never a cry that passed my lips.

Irving followed Rusty, at the goodly distance of some seven years. Irving was a black poodle, sold to me as a toy but who turned out to be a standard. Nothing about poor Irving was quite licit, including my owning him in an apartment where dogs were strictly verboten. I had acquired Irving in the first place to please a woman with whom I was much taken, who was herself quite mad about domestic animals. She had earlier presented me with a hamster to whom, frankly, I was never quite able, as they say, to relate. Owing to Irving's precarious position in the apartment as, in effect, a stowaway, through no fault of his own he was never able to get the business of doing his business down pat. He had to be taken out at odd hours—when, specifically, the coast was clear—or often rushed out just before he was no longer able to control himself. Consequently, all his days he relieved himself nervously, never quite stationary in the act, always shuffling about slightly. Irving was eventually turned over to a childless aunt of mine who already owned a Chihuahua whom she hand-fed and had named—so far as I could make out, without a trace of irony—Caesar. She treated Irving with surpassing kindness, for which I was immensely grateful, since I felt it let me off the hook a bit for what I had put him through.

The woman for whom I bought Irving and I went on to live in a state of holy matrimony and a condition of impressive chaos for nearly a decade. At one point we had three dogs (a mongrelized sheepdog named Luv, the feckless Sigmund, and dear Max) and two Siamese cats (Ralph and Clara were their names), not to speak of a thirty-gallon antique tank stocked with tropical fish. The Siamese cats had two different litters of kittens. (Ralph shall always remain memorable to me for using a bathroom toilet to make water, a trick he must have picked up from the example of the boy children in the house.) One day I came home to discover an enormous collie that had been left at the Anti-Cruelty Society by a young man going off to Vietnam; it proved to be too much, and a few days later the collie was returned whence it came: "Lassie scram." At various times during this marriage I felt less like a husband and father than a rancher.

"Divorced, no kids, no cats," with a few touches of anatomical description thrown in, is not an uncommon shorthand for one man formulating the situation of a woman to another, interested and eligible, man. My second (my current, my final, my dear and irreplaceable) wife was neither divorced nor had children, but she did have a cat, Ursala, when we married. I still had my main man, the Yorkshire terrier Max. Max and Ursala, Ursala and Max—either way it sounded like a delightful German film. Ursala was very black, very elegant, very independent, and not one to bestow affection thoughtlessly. Even now I recall the first time she climbed onto my lap, after I had been around her for some two years, and the enormous compliment I felt in the gesture.

Max, charming and not entirely resourceless, Max, always desirous of friendship, put his best moves on Ursala. When she was sitting on a couch he would gently sidle up; when she was stretched out upon a rug he with tactful caution would approach. But it was no go; for his efforts, he got a hiss and a spit, or sometimes a declawed paw in the *punim*. We were pulling for Max all the way, hoping Ursala would relent, aching to witness

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the lion lie down with the lamb. Alas, he had no more chance than a fellow with a few gold neck chains and a lot of cheap astrology talk setting out to seduce Greta Garbo. Another animal fantasy blown out of the air.

But I wish to report a reformation of character, at least in this particular regard, with the entry into my life, some three years ago, of our cat Isabelle. I am not ready to go so far as those authors who, in their acknowledgments to their books, wish to thank their husbands or wives for making them warm and open and caring persons, but this cat has, I believe, taught me a thing or two about the proper relationship between human beings and animals. She has given me much quiet pleasure and no pain whatsoever. I am pleased to have earned her toleration and continue to be delighted by her not infrequent gift of affection. Her demeanor is a reminder that it is possible to get through life without having to be in the least obsequious. Her longish tail, which forms itself at its tip into a question mark when she walks with a certain confident gait, reminds me, when I note it, of the value of skepticism. To gaze upon her in certain of her moods, especially when she is sleeping, can render me almost instantly tranquil. I have decided that this little animal is for me the cat of cats, the long-awaited one, the animal who will mean most to me in my life and who is likely never to be replaced in my affection.

A cat, I realize, cannot be everyone's cup of fur. Alexander the Great, Napoleon, and Hitler are all said to have been ailurophobes. Scarcely shocking, this, for if one has a taste for command and a potent will to power, one does better without a cat for company. Cats resist compulsion and are by nature unpunishable; a grown man or woman yelling at a cat makes a ridiculous spectacle. It may be that you can't teach an old dog new tricks, but, unless one is fanatical, one cannot hope to teach a new cat old tricks. Besides, they have such interesting tricks of their own. You must either take a cat as she is or leave her alone. "A cat's game," a phrase from tic-tac-toe, means standoff, stalemate, forget about it. Even the notion of *owning* a cat seems faintly absurd; better to say that one is living with a cat and paying the bills.

When not long ago, after recounting how much pleasure Isabelle's company has given me, I advised a friend to consider acquiring a cat, he shook his head and replied, "I consider cats furniture." An amusing remark, and not without its quotient of truth. A cat can sit in the same place, awake yet supremely supine, longer than any breathing creature going. (As pure furniture, I should add, perhaps nothing surpasses the cat as the most decorative domestic item the world has thus far produced.) To admire this extreme talent for repose in cats, one must oneself have a certain aspiration for repose in one's own life. Schopenhauer spoke to this point of torpid contentment in certain animals—surely cats must have been uppermost in his mind, since he said that neither dogs nor apes had it—this enjoyment of life as simple existence, claiming that those animals command it who live outside anything beyond immediate motivation. "That is why," Schopenhauer writes in one of his aphorisms, "they find complete contentment in simple existence and why it suffices to fill their entire lives; so that they can pass many hours completely inactive without feeling discontented or impatient, although they are not thinking but merely looking."

I once remarked of William Maxwell, some of whose novels I admire, that if he had any serious flaw it was that he tended to anthropomorphize children. I am rather sorry I said that, for I now intend to anthropomorphize our cat. I often try to imagine what, if Isabelle had human speech, she would say. I assume that for the most part she would keep her own counsel, using language only with great precision and never needing to avail herself of words that end in "ism." Comparing hers to a human life, I sometimes envy her the leisure of her days and all the things she doesn't have to do: work her way through the turgid fatuity of a *New York Times* editorial, make a quarterly tax payment, meet a deadline, believe in progress, feign interest. She need give no thought to owning a fax machine or computer; she need not have anything to do with technical advances. "So that's the telephone," said Degas to Forain, when the latter was so proud of having had one installed in his house. "They ring, and you run." When my telephone rings, Isabelle doesn't even blink. Let us not speak of "call waiting."

When I leave the apartment, I generally say good-bye to Isabelle, even if she is asleep. If this isn't anthropomorphizing, I'm not sure what is. Yet when I return, she generally walks to the door to greet me. (Felinomor-

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phizing, perhaps?) Isabelle is a house cat; she only leaves the apartment in a carrying case—lined, to be sure, with a thick yellow towel—either to see a veterinarian, or to go off with us on a weekend visit, or to board with a relative when we are traveling. You probably ought to know, too, that her front claws have been removed; and she has been—a much less than apt word—"fixed." The declawing and the de-sexing were done more for my convenience than for hers. Letting her run free in our urban neighborhood carries less moral complication; to do so would be to invite her quick departure if not demise. Still, to put the question anthropofelinosophically, would I give up the right to claw and fornicate at will for a reasonable amount of security, food, and comfort? Don't look now, folks, but I believe I already have. In modern life, it is apparently civilization and its discontents for cats, too.

But enough of discontents, of which the world provides sufficient to go round. I don't think many are evident in Isabelle, who, at four years old, is a cat full of fire, which is the way I prefer a cat. When the mood is upon her, she goes galloping down the long hall of our apartment, leaping onto the top of the back of a high wing chair. Or she will jump from my desk to a nearby file cabinet, thence to hop atop a bookcase. She has a lovely way of suddenly appearing—on my desk, on our bed, behind my reading chair—with an effortless little Balanchinian hop that I think of as her "star turn." When she does this, the impression I always get is that of a great ballerina suddenly emergent from the wings. All this while, with all this galloping, leaping, hopping, in a fairly *tsatske*-laden apartment, Isabelle has never broken a single item.

This cat has given us no trouble over diet, having none of the finickiness about food for which domestic cats are infamous. She even defies the standard generalizations in this line. The essayist Agnes Repplier has remarked that she has "never known a cat that would touch ham": Isabelle relishes it, but then shows little interest in a bowl of milk. The cat, write Frances and Richard Lockbridge, two popular writers on the subject, "is a great victim of the human inclination to generalize." Quite true; and her use to the essayist may be precisely that, in her conduct, she generally tends to defy all generalizations applied to her.

"We cannot," remarked the scientist St. George Mivart, "without becoming cats, perfectly understand the cat mind." Carl Van Vechten, author of *The Tiger in the House,* in my opinion the best of all books about cats, puts it rather better: "Faith is needed to comprehend the cat, to understand that one can never comprehend the cat." Whether cats "think" at all is, among ethologists, apparently a matter of serious debate. Yet if it is not thoughtfulness, what is it in Isabelle that has allowed her to become so keen—and she grows steadily keener—at sensing the moods of those into whose hands her fate has rather arbitrarily been tossed? She does not always come when wanted—and never on demand—yet she never arrives when unwanted, and, as it happens, is always wanted when she arrives. And why not? She has brought me, variously, tranquility, companionship, an enhanced sense of life's possibilities. All she in her turn asks is that I never impugn her independence.

Carl Van Vechten writes that the cat ought to serve as an inspiration to the writer, since the cat suggests grace, power, and beauty, and "the perfect symmetry of his body urges one to achieve an equally perfect form" in one's work.

> The sharp but concealed claws, the contracting pupil of the eye, which allows only the necessary amount of light to enter, the independence, should be the best models for any critic; the graceful movements of the animal who waves a glorious banner as he walks silently should stir the soul of any poet. The cat symbolizes, indeed, all that a good writer tries to put into his work.

Van Vechten goes on to say that the cat, with his reserves of dignity and urbanity, his magisterial calm overlaying his bountiful energy, "is as nearly as possible what many a writer would like to be himself." There's something to it.

There's something also to Van Vechten's adding that the cat can inspire literary creation on nearly any subject—"any subject, mind you, not necessarily on the cat himself." Part of the problem is that cats are a good deal more difficult to describe than are men and women. They are not so easily drawn or painted, either, at least in a way that captures the true individuality that anyone who has lived with a cat knows that his own cat possesses. Here it strikes me that the cat has been

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better drawn than painted, perhaps because in a drawing the element of character—or, more precisely, caricature—comes through more lucidly.

Close readers will have noted that thus far along I have shied away from describing anything about my own cat except the charming question mark that the end of her tail sometimes forms. Isabelle, you should know, is a tabby, with dark stripes predominating over a taupe background on her long, rather slender body. On her forehead she has the traditional M-shape marking of the tabby; and black lines, which shape themselves into slightly exotic wings, flair out in perfect (as opposed to William Blake's "fearful") symmetry along both her cheeks. Her whiskers are white and emerge from near a dotting or freckling along and just beneath her nose. Plenty of taupe plays about her face; her underbody is a mélange of different shades of taupe; her only white fur is under her chin. She has a small head, an extremely elegant one, in my opinion. I much prefer a cat with a small head, for too large a head not only seems indelicate in itself but is a bit too tigerish for my taste. I read into a large-headed cat the tableau of a tiger ripping the entrails of a gazelle near a brackish pond: red tooth of nature and all that, whereas my own clear preference runs to white tooth of dental floss and a warm bathrobe.

I have spent a fair amount of time gazing into Isabelle's face and must confess that I have not found there the least trace of what the French poet Charles Cros suspects, in a white cat of his acquaintance, of what we should nowadays call a hidden agenda: "*Je te demande dans ces vers / Quel secret dort dans tes yeux verts / Quel sarcasme sous ta moustache.*" Nor, peering into Isabelle's blue-green eyes, have I ever discovered what it was that caused George Eliot to ask: "Who can tell what just criticisms the cat may be passing on us beings of wider speculation?" The great French draughtsman Grandville claimed to have discovered seventy-five different expressions on the faces of cats. I have never counted those I have discovered on Isabelle, but among them have been neither uncritical adoration nor secret contempt, which seems to me fair enough.

Lots of music plays in this apartment, all of it so-called "serious" music, much of it coming from radios dialed to classical music stations. This music seems further to becalm the already quite calm Isabelle, who appears especially taken with baroque music, with, I believe I detect, a particular partiality for woodwinds. So utterly content does she seem when lying on a bed or on my desk with music playing that, when I have to leave the apartment briefly, I often leave the radio playing for her. Anecdotes about the enjoyment of music by cats are not uncommon. Théophile Gautier wrote charmingly about one of his cats' reactions to hearing singers whom Gautier accompanied on the piano in his apartment. The cat of the composer Henri Sauguet was bonkers for the music of Debussy. For a time I thought Isabelle quite gone on Bach's Cantata 147, "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring," in the Dame Myra Hess transcription. Desmond Morris, the zoologist, claims that "the musical sense of cats is just another feline myth." I am sure he is correct, but I prefer to cling, ever so lightly, to the myth. "Human kind," a certain lover of cats named T. S. Eliot once remarked, "cannot bear very much reality." Perhaps ailurophiles can bear just a jot less.

What may be at work here is the naïve hope that a creature who has given me so much comfort and pleasure can herself take comfort and pleasure in some of the same things I do. For a long while I felt similarly about feline companionship for Isabelle and contemplated acquiring a second cat. She, Isabelle, spent the first months of her life in a bookshop—"Cat-free Bookstore" reads the sign in the window of an old *New Yorker* cartoon, suggesting that there aren't all that many of them—and the first time I saw her she was asleep entwined with a large, gentle marmalade-colored cat named Gingy. Two cats are said to be better than one, or so the current received wisdom has it, especially if one goes off to work and leaves a cat alone most of the day. Isabelle is not alone in this way, yet I have, I suppose guiltily, felt that, in installing her in our apartment, perhaps I have cruelly deprived her of the company of her own kind.

Perhaps. Yet every time I have seen Isabelle with other cats, she has appeared either bored or put off by them. Feline sociability does not seem to be, as they said in the sixties, her "thing." Which leads me to wonder if perhaps it was I who really wanted yet another cat. Adding cats is not difficult to do. Ernest Newman, the music critic of the *Times* in London, longed for the day he could settle

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into a house and have a cat. He ended up with three. (Those cats must have heard some splendid music.) The decisive jump, I have always thought, is from two cats to three. If three cats, after all, why not five? And if five, why not eight? I would say that family therapy is strongly indicated somewhere around six cats, at least for apartment dwellers.

I hope that I have not given the impression that Isabelle is a genius among cats, for it is not so. If cats had IQs, hers, my guess is, would fall somewhere in the middle range; if cats took SATs, we should have to look for a small school somewhere in the Middle West for her where discipline is not emphasized. Isabelle eats flowers—though for some reason not African violets—and cannot be convinced to refrain. We consequently don't keep flowers in the apartment. Although my wife and I love flowers, we have decided that we love this cat more, and the deprivation of one of life's several little pleasures is worth it.

I am, then, prepared to allow that Isabelle isn't brilliant but not that she isn't dear. She is, as I have mentioned, currently only four years old, yet already—perhaps it is a habit of my own middle age—I begin to think of the shortness of her life, even stretched to its fullest potential. Owing to the companionship of this cat, I have begun to understand friends who, having lost a dog or cat through age or illness, choose not to replace it, saying that they can't bear to go through it all again.

Solzhenitsyn remarks in one of his novels that people who cannot be kind to animals are unlikely to be kind to human beings. A charming sentiment but far, I suspect, from generally true. ("I wanted you to see why I work with animals," says a female veterinarian in a novel by Jim Harrison. "I can't stand people.") Yet genuine kindness to animals is always impressive. One of the finest stories told about Mohammed has to do with his having to answer the call to prayer while a cat is asleep on the hem of his cloak; with scissors he cuts off the hem, lest he wake the cat, and proceeds on his way.

Searching for the cat who turned out to be Isabelle, I met a woman who converted two of the three stories of her house in a working-class neighborhood over to the care of injured and deserted animals: three-legged cats, a blind German shepherd, an aged St. Bernard in a body bandage are among the animals I recall roaming the first floor. Something like eighty cats lived in the basement. The smell, expense, sheer trouble of it all overwhelmed me and I didn't hang around long. The existence of Heaven, though, suddenly made a good deal of sense, for nothing less can be a just reward for such a woman.

Cats are said to be notably deficient in gratitude. Certainly they are nowhere near so efficient at sending thank-you notes as, say, members of the Junior League. But they have their own extraordinary ways of repaying such trivial debts as they accrue: through their example of repose, through the sensuous harmony of their elegant movements, through their gift of unpredictable but always welcome affection. I need call in no auditor to inform me that my debts to Isabelle vastly exceed hers to me, and that there is no way to pay them off except with a mute gratitude and an occasional privately uttered toast: "Here's looking at you, kid, than which few things give more pleasure."

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White Guilt

SHELBY STEELE

I DON'T REMEMBER HEARING the phrase "white guilt" very much before the mid-1960s. Growing up black in the 1950s, I never had the impression that whites were much disturbed by guilt when it came to blacks. When I would stray into the wrong restaurant in pursuit of a hamburger, it didn't occur to me that the waitress was unduly troubled by guilt when she asked me to leave. I can see now that possibly she was, but then all I saw was her irritability at having to carry out so unpleasant a task. If there was guilt, it was mine for having made an imposition of myself. I can remember feeling a certain sympathy for such people, as if I was victimizing them by drawing them out of an innocent anonymity into the unasked for role of racial policemen. Occasionally they came right out and asked me to feel sorry for them. A caddymaster at a country club told my brother and me that he was doing us a favor by not letting us caddy at this white club and that we should try to understand his position, "put yourselves in my shoes." Our color had brought this man anguish and, if a part of that anguish was guilt, it was not as immediate to me as my own guilt. I smiled at the man to let him know he shouldn't feel bad and then began my long walk home. Certainly I also judge him a coward, but in that era his cowardice was something I had to absorb.

In the 1960s, particularly the black-is-beautiful late 1960s, this absorption of another's cowardice was no longer necessary. The lines of moral power, like plates in the earth, had shifted. White guilt became so palpable you could see it on people. At the time what it looked like to my eyes was a remarkable loss of authority. And what whites lost in authority, blacks gained. You cannot feel guilty about anyone without giving away power to them. Suddenly, this huge vulnerability had opened up in whites and, as a black, you had the power to step right into it. In fact, black power all but demanded that you do so. What shocked me in the late 1960s, after the helplessness I had felt in the fifties, was that guilt had changed the nature of the white man's burden from the

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administration of inferiors to the uplift of equals—from the obligations of dominance to the urgencies of repentance.

I think what made the difference between the fifties and sixties, at least as far as white guilt was concerned, was that whites underwent an archetypal Fall. Because of the immense turmoil of the civil rights movement, and later the black-power movement, whites were confronted for more than a decade with their willingness to participate in, or comply with, the oppression of blacks, their indifference to human suffering and denigration, their capacity to abide evil for their own benefit and in the defiance of their own sacred principles. The 1964 Civil Rights Bill that bestowed equality under the law on blacks was also, in a certain sense, an admission of white guilt. Had white society not been wrong, there would have been no need for such a bill. In this bill the nation acknowledged its fallenness, its lack of racial innocence, and confronted the incriminating self-knowledge that it had rationalized for many years a flagrant injustice. Denial is a common way of handling guilt, but in the 1960s there was little will left for denial except in the most recalcitrant whites. With this defense lost there was really only one road back to innocence—through actions and policies that would bring redemption.

In the 1960s the need for white redemption from racial guilt became the most powerful, yet unspoken, element in America's social-policy-making process, first giving rise to the Great Society and then to a series of programs, policies, and laws that sought to make black equality and restitution a national mission. Once America could no longer deny its guilt, it went after redemption, or at least the look of redemption, and did so with a vengeance. Yet today, some twenty years later, study after study tells us that by many measures the gap between blacks and whites is widening rather than narrowing. A University of Chicago study indicates that segregation is more entrenched in American cities today than ever imagined. A National Research Council study notes the "status of blacks relative to whites (in housing and education) has stagnated or regressed since the early seventies." A follow-up to the famous Kerner Commission Report warns that blacks are as much at risk today of becoming a "nation within a nation" as we were twenty years ago, when the original report was made.

I think the white need for redemption has contributed to this tragic situation by shaping our policies regarding blacks in ways that may deliver the look of innocence to society and its institutions but that do very little actually to uplift blacks. The specific effect of this hidden need has been to bend social policy more toward reparation for black oppression than toward the much harder and more mundane work of black uplift and development. Rather than facilitate the development of blacks

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to achieve parity with whites, these programs and policies—affirmative action is a good example—have tended to give blacks special entitlements that in many cases are of no use because blacks lack the development that would put us in a position to take advantage of them. I think the reason there has been more entitlement than development is (along with black power) the unacknowledged white need for redemption—not true redemption, which would have concentrated policy on black development, but the appearance of redemption, which requires only that society, in the name of development, seem to be paying back its former victims with preferences. One of the effects of entitlements, I believe, has been to encourage in blacks a dependency both on entitlements and on the white guilt that generates them. Even when it serves ideal justice, bounty from another man's guilt weakens. While this is not the only factor in black "stagnation" and "regression," I believe it is one very potent factor.

It is easy enough to say that white guilt too often has the effect of bending social policies in the wrong direction. But what exactly is this guilt, and how does it work in American life?

I think white guilt, in its broad sense, springs from a knowledge of ill-gotten advantage. More precisely, it comes from the juxtaposition of this knowledge with the inevitable gratitude one feels for being white rather than black in America. Given the moral instincts of human beings, it is all but impossible to enjoy an ill-gotten advantage, much less to feel at least secretly grateful for it, without consciously or unconsciously experiencing guilt. If, as Kierkegaard writes, "innocence is ignorance," then guilt must always involve knowledge. White Americans *know* that their historical advantage comes from the subjugation of an entire people. So, even for whites today for whom racism is anathema, there is no escape from the knowledge that makes for guilt. Racial guilt simply accompanies the condition of being white in America.

I do not believe that this guilt is a crushing anguish for most whites, but I do believe it constitutes a continuing racial vulnerability—an openness to racial culpability—that is a thread in white life, sometimes felt, sometimes not, but ever present as a potential feeling. In the late 1960s almost any black could charge this vulnerability with enough current for a white person to feel it. I had a friend who had developed this activity into a sort of specialty. I don't think he meant to be mean, though certainly he was mean. I think he was, in that hyperbolic era, exhilarated by the discovery that his race, which had long been a liability, now gave him a certain edge—that white guilt was the true force behind black power. To feel this power he would sometimes set up what he called "race experiments." Once I watched him stop a white businessman in the men's room of a large hotel and convince him to increase his tip to the black attendant from one to twenty dollars.

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My friend's tactic was very simple, even corny. Out of the attendant's earshot he asked the man simply to look at the attendant, a frail, elderly, and very dark man in a starched white smock that made the skin on his neck and face look as leathery as a turtle's. He sat listlessly, pathetically, on a straight-backed chair next to a small table on which sat a stack of hand towels and a silver plate for tips. Since the attendant offered no service whatever beyond the handing out of towels, one could only conclude the hotel management offered his lowly presence as flattery to their patrons, as an opportunity for that easy noblesse oblige that could reassure even the harried and weary traveling salesman of his superior station. My friend was quick to make this point to the businessman and to say that no white man would do in this job. But when the businessman put the single back in his wallet and took out a five, my friend only sneered. Did he understand the tragedy of a life spent this way, of what it must be like to earn one's paltry living as a symbol of inferiority? And did he realize that his privilege as an affluent white businessman (ironically he had just spent the day trying to sell a printing press to the Black Muslims for their newspaper *Mohammed Speaks)* was connected to the deprivation of this man and others like him?

But then my friend made a mistake that ended the game. In the heat of argument, which until then had only been playfully challenging, he inadvertently mentioned his father. This stopped the victim cold and his eyes turned inward. "What about your father?" the businessman asked. My friend replied, "He had a hard life, that's all." "How did he have a hard life?" the businessman asked. Now my friend was on the defensive. I knew he did not get along with his father, a bitter man who worked nights in a factory and demanded that the house be dark and silent all day. My friend blamed his father's bitterness on racism, but I knew he had not meant to exploit his own pain in this silly "experiment." Things had gotten too close to home, but he didn't know how to get out of the situation without losing face. Now, caught in his own trap, he did what he least wanted to do. He gave forth the rage he truly felt to a white stranger in a public men's room. "My father never had a chance," he said with the kind of anger that could easily turn to tears. "He never had a freakin' chance. Your father had all the goddamn chances, and you know he did. You sell printing presses to black people and make thousands and your father probably lives down in Fat City, Florida, all because you're white." On and on he went in this vein, using—against all that was honorable in him—his own profound racial pain to extract a flash of guilt from a white man he didn't even know.

He got more than a flash. The businessman was touched. His eyes became mournful, and finally he simply said, "You're right. Your people got a raw deal." He took a twenty dollar bill from his wallet and walked

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over and dropped it in the old man's tip plate. When he was gone my friend and I could not look at the old man, nor could we look at each other.

It is obvious that this was a rather shameful encounter for all concerned—my friend and I, as his silent accomplice, trading on our racial pain, tampering with a stranger for no reason, and the stranger then buying his way out of the situation for twenty dollars, a sum that was generous by one count and cheap by another. It was not an encounter of people but of historical grudges and guilts. Yet, when I think about it now twenty years later, I see that it had all the elements of a paradigm that I believe has been very much at the heart of racial policy-making in America since the 1960s.

My friend did two things that made this businessman vulnerable to his guilt—that brought his guilt into the situation as a force. First he put this man in touch with his own knowledge of his ill-gotten advantage as a white. The effect of this was to disallow the man any pretense of racial innocence, to let him know that, even if he was not the sort of white who used the word *nigger* around the dinner table, he still had reason to feel racial guilt. But, as disarming as this might have been, it was too abstract to do much more than crack open this man's vulnerability, to expose him to the logic of white guilt. This was the five-dollar, intellectual sort of guilt. The twenty dollars required something more visceral. In achieving this, the second thing my friend did was something he had not intended to do, something that ultimately brought him as much shame as he was doling out: He made a display of his own racial pain and anger. (What brought him shame was not the pain and anger, but his trading on them for what turned out to be a mere twenty bucks.) The effect of this display was to reinforce the man's knowledge of ill-gotten advantage, to give credibility and solidity to it by putting a face on it. Here was human testimony, a young black beside himself at the thought of his father's racially constricted life. The pain of one man evidenced the knowledge of the other. When the businessman listened to my friend's pain, his racial guilt—normally only one source of guilt lying dormant among others—was called out like a neglected debt he would finally have to settle. An ill-gotten advantage is not hard to bear—it can be marked up to fate—until it touches the genuine human pain it has brought into the world. This is the pain that hardens guilty knowledge.

Such knowledge is a powerful influence when it becomes conscious. What makes it so powerful is the element of fear that guilt always carries, the fear of what the guilty knowledge says about us. Guilt makes us afraid for ourselves, and thus generates as much self-preoccupation as concern for others. The nature of this preoccupation is always the redemption of innocence, the reestablishment of good feeling about oneself.

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In this sense, the fear for the self that is buried in all guilt is a pressure toward selfishness. It can lead us to put our own need for innocence above our concern for the problem that made us feel guilt in the first place. But this fear for the self does not only inspire selfishness; it also becomes a pressure to *escape* the guilt-inducing situation. When selfishness and escapism are at work, we are no longer interested in the source of our guilt and, therefore, no longer concerned with an authentic redemption from it. Then we only want the look of redemption, the gesture of concern that will give us the appearance of innocence and escape from the situation. Obviously the businessman did not put twenty dollars in the tip plate because he thought it would uplift black Americans. He did it selfishly for the appearance of concern and for the escape it afforded him.

This is not to say that guilt is never the right motive for doing good works or showing concern, only that it is a very dangerous one because of its tendency to draw us into self-preoccupation and escapism. Guilt is a civilizing emotion when the fear for the self that it carries is contained—a containment that allows guilt to be more selfless and that makes genuine concern possible. I think this was the kind of guilt that, along with the other forces, made the 1964 Civil Rights Bill possible. But since then I believe too many of our social policies related to race have been shaped by the fearful underside of guilt.

Black power evoked white guilt and made it a force in American institutions, very much in the same way as my friend brought it to life in the businessman. Few people volunteer for guilt. Usually others make us feel it. It was the expression of black anger and pain that hardened the guilty knowledge of white ill-gotten advantage. And black power—whether from militant fringe groups, the civil rights establishment, or big city political campaigns—knew exactly the kind of white guilt it was after. It wanted to trigger the kind of white guilt in which whites fear for their own decency and innocence; it wanted the guilt of white self-preoccupation and escapism. Always at the heart of black power, in whatever form, has been a profound anger at what was done to blacks and an equally profound feeling that there should be reparations. But a sober white guilt (in which fear for the self is still contained) seeks a strict fairness—the 1964 Civil Rights Bill that guaranteed equality under the law. It is of little value when one is after more than fairness. So black power made its mission to have whites fear for their innocence, to feel a visceral guilt from which they would have to seek a more profound redemption. In such redemption was the possibility of black reparation. Black power upped the ante on white guilt.

With black power, all of the elements of the hidden paradigm that shape America's race-related social policy were in place. Knowledge of

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ill-gotten advantage could now be shown and deepened by black power into the sort of guilt from which institutions could only redeem themselves by offering more than fairness—by offering forms of reparation and compensation for past injustice. I believe this bent our policies toward racial entitlements at the expense of racial development. In 1964, one of the assurances Senator Hubert Humphrey and others had to give Congress to get the landmark Civil Rights Bill passed was that the bill would not in any way require employers to use racial preferences to rectify racial imbalances. But this was before the explosion of black power in the late 1960s, before the hidden paradigm was set in motion. After black power, racial preferences became the order of the day.

If this paradigm brought blacks entitlements, it also brought the continuation of the most profound problem in American society, the invisibility of blacks as a people. The white guilt that this paradigm elicits is the kind of guilt that preoccupies whites with their own innocence and pressures them toward escapism—twenty dollars in the plate and out the door. With this guilt, as opposed to the contained guilt of genuine concern, whites tend to see only their own need for quick redemption. Blacks then become a means to this redemption and, as such, they must be seen as generally "less than" others. Their needs are "special," "unique," "different." They are seen exclusively along the dimension of their victimization, so that they become "different" people with whom whites can negotiate entitlements but never fully see as people like themselves. Guilt that preoccupies people with their own innocence blinds them to those who make them feel guilty. This, of course, is not racism, and yet it has the same effect as racism since it makes blacks something of a separate species for whom normal standards and values do not automatically apply.

Nowhere is this more evident today than in American universities. At some of America's most elite universities administrators have granted concessions in response to black student demands (black power) that all but sanction racial separatism on campus—black "theme" dorms, black student unions, black yearbooks, homecoming dances, and so forth. I don't believe administrators sincerely believe in these separatist concessions. Most of them are liberals who see racial separatism as wrong. But black student demands pull administrators into the paradigm of self-preoccupied white guilt, whereby they seek a quick redemption by offering special entitlements that go beyond fairness. As a result, black students become all but invisible to them. Though blacks have the lowest grade point average of any racial group in American universities, administrators never sit down with them and "demand" in kind that black students bring their grades up to par. The paradigm of white guilt makes the real problems of black students secondary to the need for

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white redemption. It also cuts administrators off from their own values, which would most certainly discourage racial separatism and encourage higher academic performance for black students. Lastly, it makes for escapist policies. There is no difference between giving black students a separate lounge and leaving twenty dollars in the tip plate on the way out the door.

What demonstrates more than anything else the degree to which university administrators (and faculties) have been subdued by this paradigm is their refusal to lead black students, to tell them what they honestly think, to insist that they perform at a higher academic level, and to ask them to integrate themselves fully into campus life. This marks the difference between self-preoccupied guilt and the guilt of genuine concern where fear for one's innocence is contained. The former grants entitlements as a means to easy innocence and escape from judgment; the latter refuses the entanglements and blindness of self-concerned guilt, and, out of honest concern, demands black development.

Escapist racial policies—policies where institutions favor black entitlement over development because of a preoccupation with their own innocence—have, I believe, a dispiriting effect on blacks. Such policies have the effect of transforming whites from victimizers into patronizers and keeping blacks where they have always been—dependent on the largesse of whites. This was made evident in a famous statement by President Lyndon Johnson at Howard University in 1965. "You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, 'You're free to compete with others,' and justly believe that you have been fair." On its surface this seems to be the most reasonable of statements, but on closer examination one can clearly see how it deflects the emphasis away from black responsibility and toward white responsibility. The actors in this statement—"you (whites) do not *take* a person (blacks)"—are whites; blacks are the passive recipients of white action. The former victimizers are challenged now to be patrons, but where is the black challenge? This is really a statement to and about white people, their guilt, their responsibility, and their road to redemption. Not only does it not enunciate a black mission, but it sees blacks only on the dimension of their victimization—"hobbled by chains"—and casts them once again into the role of receivers of white beneficence. Nowhere in this utterance does President Johnson show respect for black resilience or faith in the capacity of blacks to run fast once they get to the "starting line." This statement, which launched Johnson's Great Society, had the two ever-present signposts of white guilt—white self-preoccupation and black invisibility.

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White guilt has influenced many of America's racial policies toward a paternalism that makes it difficult for blacks to find their true mettle or to develop a faith in their own capacity to run as fast as others. The most vivid examples of this are the many forms of preferential treatment that come under the heading of affirmative action—an escapist racial policy, I believe, that offers entitlements rather than development to blacks. A preference is not a training program; it teaches no skills, instills no values. It only makes a color a passport. But the worst aspect of racial preferences is that they encourage dependency on entitlements rather than on our own initiative, a situation that has already led many blacks to believe that we cannot have fairness without entitlements. Here one falls into Orwellian doublespeak, where *preference* means *equality*. At the heart of this confusion, I believe, is an unspoken black doubt about our ability to compete that is covered over by a preoccupation with racial discrimination. Since there are already laws to protect us against discrimination, preferences only impute a certain helplessness to blacks that diminishes our self-esteem. The self-preoccupied form of white guilt that is behind racial preferences always makes us lower so that we can be lifted up.

Recently Pennsylvania State University launched a program that pays black students for improving their grades—a C to C+ average brings $550, and anything higher brings $1,100. Here is the sort of guilty kindness that kills. What kind of self-respect is a black student going to have as he or she reaches out to take $550 for C work when many white students would be embarrassed by so average a performance? What better way to drive home the nail of inferiority? What more Pavlovian system of conditioning blacks to dependency than shelling out cash for grades? Here black students learn to hustle their victimization rather than overcome it, while their patrons escape with the cheapest sort of innocence. Not all preferential treatment is this insidious, but the same dynamic is always at work when skin color brings entitlement.

I think effective racial policies can only come from the sort of white guilt where fear for the self is contained, so that genuine concern can ultimately emerge. The test for this healthy guilt is simply a heartfelt feeling of concern without any compromise of one's highest values and principles. But how can whites reach this more selfless form of guilt? I believe the only way is to slacken one's grip on innocence. Guilt has always been the lazy man's way to innocence—I feel guilt *because* I am innocent, and guilt confirms my innocence. It is the compulsion to think always of ourselves as innocent that binds us to self-preoccupied guilt. Whites in general, and particularly those public and private insitutions (not necessarily white) that make racial policy, must not be so preoccu-

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pied with their image of innocence or, put another way, their public relations of good intentions. What is needed now is a new spirit of pragmatism in racial matters where blacks are viewed simply as American citizens who deserve complete fairness, and in some cases developmental assistance, but in no case special entitlements based on color. We need social policies that attack poverty rather than *black* poverty and that instill those values that make for self-reliance. The white message to blacks must be: America hurt you badly and that is wrong, but entitlements only prolong the hurt, while development overcomes it.

Selfish white guilt is really self-importance. It has no humility, and it asks for an unreasonable, egotistical innocence. Nothing diminishes a black more than this sort of guilt in a white, which to my mind amounts to a sort of moral colonialism. We used to say in the 1960s that at least in the South you knew where you stood. I always thought this was a little foolish, since I didn't like where I stood there. But I think one of the things we meant by this—at the time—was that the South had little investment in its racial innocence and that this was very liberating in an ironical sort of way. It meant there would be no entangling complications with white need. It gave us back ourselves. The selfishly guilty white person is drawn to what blacks least like in themselves—their suffering, victimization, and dependency. This is no good for anyone—black or white.

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The Prince, the People, and the Architects

NATHAN GLAZER

THE PRINCE OF WALES, IN HIS SPEECHES AND BOOK, *A Vision for Britain*, attacking modernist architects for buildings they have put up in the post-war years in Britain, has aroused an uproar among architects. One writer in *Architectural Review*, the leading British architectural journal, even finds the source of the Prince's taste in the architecture of Nazi Germany. He reproduces some pictures of new housing from a German publicity handout of 1940, and sure enough they show single-family homes on their own little plots. Because the Nazis preferred single-family houses to apartment-home blocks, he finds a "precedent for the Prince." Of course we find the same preference in Pare Lorentz's famous movie *The City*, made for the New York World's Fair in 1939, or in the books and articles of the reformers Clarence Stein and Lewis Mumford, advocating planned communities of low density for families. And these were no Nazis. But architects give the Prince no quarter.

Another architectural critic in the *New Republic* takes the Prince to task for colonialism, racism, and imperialism because he likes classical architecture and would prefer to see more classical elements in contemporary building. In this storm of denunciation, the Prince can only find satisfaction in the fact that the ordinary people seem to agree with him, and that his critics are hysterical.

Which raises a paradox: How is it possible that modernist architecture, which began with deep social concerns, and one of whose themes was proper housing for workers to improve their lot, now requires an elitist defense, arguing that only properly qualified, professionally trained experts should discuss and criticize architecture? How did a

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socially concerned architecture turn out to be condemned, fifty years later, as soulless, bureaucratic, and inhuman—a critique that receives wide acceptance by ordinary folk, who have enthusiastically and overwhelmingly applauded the Prince's attacks on contemporary architecture, and by many architects and planners as well?

It was in the thirties that modern ideas in architecture first began to filter back, with some influence, to the United States. Americans returning from Europe began to bring us news of the modern movement. Some of them were mostly interested in the new, stripped down, unornamented, "functional" aesthetic forms, but others were more interested in housing for workers. Catherine Bauer's *Modern Housing* had a great influence on concerned architects, on planners, and on the early public housing movement. She brought back pictures of the new housing being built in Europe by socialist or socially concerned governments. We looked at the pictures with admiration. Instead of the messy working-class districts we knew in American cities, with their crowded buildings built right up in a wall against the streets, with their mixture of housing and stores and pushcarts and signs, with their sidewalks crowded with pedestrians and horses—there were not many cars in poor areas then—we saw simple blocks of buildings, in modern styles, oriented to catch the sun, with ample space around each block.

Yet today these once-admired building blocks for workers from Germany and Holland and England would not find many admirers; without knowing when or under what regime they were built, most people would prefer those individual homes, shown in the Nazi publicity pamphlet. And many architects would agree. Moshe Safdie, in his book *Form and Purpose,* shows pictures of Israeli apartment complexes on the hills around Jerusalem, built under a social democratic government. And he contrasts them unfavorably with Arab housing built without benefit of modernism, or government concern for the poor, or housing laws that guarantee subsidized and modern dwelling units to the poor. In other words, the product of architectural concern for the working classes doesn't evoke much admiration today.

What seemed in the 1930s and early post–World War II decades to be responsive to social needs—and indeed *was* responsive to social needs as far as architects and planners and socially minded governments could discern them at the time—now seems to us inhumane, soulless, bureaucratic. It is a very upsetting development, if we are concerned that architects take more account of social considerations, when the housing produced at a time that architects were most socially minded now appears to us pretty poor stuff. Were we wrong then about what was good housing for the poor, and are we right now? And if our tastes have changed so radically, is it possible that they will change again and that we were right then and are wrong now?

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Consider a concrete example of how our tastes and judgments about housing for the poor have changed since the thirties. There is an aerial photograph, much reproduced in reformist books on housing and urbanism, of one of our first housing projects, set in the midst of a sea of slums and tenements in Brooklyn. We see from the air the endless grid of streets, lined with unbroken housing. We can see in the middle of each block, if we look closely, something rather fuzzy—the backyards behind the tenements of each block. In the middle of the photograph a dozen blocks have been cleared away, obliterating tenements and streets, and set on this white and empty site are lined up many slabs of housing, set at an angle to the street grid—as if to remind us that the original street grid was set down by soulless, market-minded surveyors. These new houses for the workers are sited scientifically to catch the sun, or for some other good reason that caused their designers to ignore the original street grid. Around the buildings is an expanse of empty land, which will be dedicated to playgrounds and greenery. I recall, as a social-minded, and socialist, youth, looking at this picture, proud at what had been done, worried about how long it would take to clear away the surrounding sea of slums.

When that photograph was first published, the tenements represented the terrible past, the housing project the future. We all know what housing projects represent to us today. Those older buildings, if they have survived, are now often more desirable not only to poor people, but to middle-class people, too.

What explains this upsetting reversal of taste? Do we deal with simple designers' idiosyncrasies, a fad, a fashion, which prefers the remaining tenements and brownstones of New York—properly remodeled of course—to the housing that was built as part of a great social experiment? That social experiment incorporated—to the extent this could be done in the practical world of bureaucrats and financial limitations—the thinking of socially concerned architects and planners. Is it that we simply and irrationally love strong cornices, stoops, columns, heavy lintels, strongly marked sills, the occasional decoration that graced even the workers' housing of the early twentieth century?

If that explains the reversal of taste, it would be irresponsible for us to prefer the old. But it turns out that many of the people for whom the subsidized public housing with plenty of open space was built *also* prefer the old. Now we must avoid the mistake of explaining people's preferences for one kind of housing or another only because of differences in design. People with few choices don't decide on the basis of design. If we were to ask them, they might say the project is less safe, or has too many drug-addicted and delinquent families, or that they can't live near their mothers, or they would give some other reason that relates

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to the social composition of the project or the bureaucratic rules under which it operates. Or if they prefer the project—and many do—we might find out that it's because it is comparatively so cheap because of its subsidies, and not because of its design and more spacious surroundings.

Design isn't everything. But design does play a role, not only in the distaste of present-day designers and architects and planners for the results of the socially concerned architects and planners of the past, but in the preferences of the people with limited choices who reject or accept them today.

And so we have our problem: Why is it that the sophisticated intelligence of socially minded architects didn't produce satisfactory environments for those with the least choice? Even worse: Why is it, as my example suggests, that environments built by commercial builders, trying simply to make a buck as best they could, so often beat out architects' environments in their appeal to ordinary people? Now here is something one has to ponder. It is all too easy to understand why the environments created by anonymous architects on Greek islands, in Italian hill towns, in Moroccan cities, are so much more attractive to architects and designers today than what either sophisticated modernists or post-modernists do. That problem is a familiar one, and we have answers that are more or less satisfactory. The town grew organically over time: in one traditional style; with one major traditional building material; it enclosed a life defined by a traditional culture. What resulted impresses all architects and designers, of whatever persuasion. In years of leafing through architectural books and magazines, I have never yet seen a picture of one of these Mediterranean urban environments that was used to illustrate a *bad* environment. Every architect or designer loves them. It is only reformers who are unsophisticated as designers, generally native, who want to sweep them away because of crowding, or dirt, or limited air, sun, and parking, and replace them with the building blocks that have become the uniform residence of people all over the world.

So we understand well enough why these environments have become so attractive to us. We know why, or can guess why, even the modern displaced Arab, who does know about other ways of building, who can use a variety of materials, who has to build his housing fast rather than over centuries, and who may want to accommodate cars, seems to build a better environment, according to Moshe Safdie, than the Israeli government agencies, with their advanced Western-trained architects and designers, modern standards, up-to-dateness in all respects.

For an architect to lose out to the Arab—or any other traditional builder of the vernacular housing of a traditional culture—in the way of

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producing good housing is not so devastating: after all, we are up against all that traditional wisdom, developed over the ages. But to lose out to the commercial builder is another matter, and one that cannot make the sophisticated designer-architect very happy. And yet very often the commercial builder beats out the architect-designer.

The question is why, and I suspect the answers will teach us more than we can learn from the Mediterranean village or the other wonderful works of the vernacular builder.

Consider two further examples of this competition between the commercial builder with no higher ambition than to produce what will sell or rent and the sophisticated architect-designer. The first comes from England, and it is the case of the town of Sunderland, a shipbuilding and coal-mining town, fallen on hard times for some decades, in which old housing has been cleared away for new development in the decades since World War II. England, we should recall, stood in the first few decades after the war at the forefront of planning internationally, and at the forefront of Europe in the provision of good housing for the working classes. It was a Mecca for anyone interested in good planning and in sensible replacement of housing stock. The case of Sunderland has been described in a fascinating book by Norman Dennis, *People and Planning*.

The worst housing, of course, went first, and there seems to have been little opposition to clearing it—after all, all those who lost their housing were guaranteed new, well-subsidized, modern housing. By 1965, the worst of the slums had been cleared, but central government money was still available for going further, and planners selected the areas—by their standards—that should be leveled, with the people rehoused in new modern flats. By this time, the resistance was severe. Why? Consider the houses that were coming down, to be replaced by modern flats. They are typical of the row houses for workers of the dreary industrial towns of England. These "cottages," as they were called in Sunderland, were built for the working class by unnamed builders one hundred years ago. Many were rented, but most were by this time owned by their inhabitants. The houses sit directly on the sidewalk. There are no trees on the street. There is no front yard. We find an entry and a bow window on the first floor, and if there's a second, as some have, two more windows. There is a tiny backyard with a brick outhouse. What could possess people to prefer these anonymous and styleless dwellings to new flats, and ones heavily subsidized to boot? But if one looks more closely, one sees that one façade has been stuccoed, another left in brick. One entry has a flat top, another an arched one. Some windows have heavily marked lintels, top and bottom. Others have the lintels stuccoed over. At the end of one block, in a unit identical to the others, is the Gardener's Arms, a pub.

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We can understand some of the reasons why people preferred to stay, and some of them have nothing to do with architects or designers. They had lived there a long time. They had their friends there. They had their local stores to shop in, their churches and chapels. All this would be hard to replace in the new areas where they were to be rehoused. They were close to the center of town, with plenty of buses. In the new outlying areas to which they would have to move, there were fewer buses, running infrequently. And even though I imagine none of us would think much of Sunderland on a Saturday night, a center is still a center, for convenience, for liveliness. Many of them owned their own cottages —and could do with them what they liked, and arrange them to their taste. They were no longer crowded. But after all this, the striking thing is that housing built with ostensibly no attention to personal taste and desire, thrown up to cover the most land and make the most money, using the materials and technology of the 1870s, was considered superior by many of those living in them to the new flats designed by the best planning authorities using good architects. Imagine what the cooking, bathing, and toileting facilities of such cottages were. The w.c.'s were typically out in the backyard, and the cottages had no bathtubs. Here was not the unfair competition of the Greek isles or the Italian hill towns—it was ordinary working-class, uninspired housing, and yet the residents preferred it.

Could they have been provided with something that gave them the advantages of the old houses they had, and which eliminated the very striking disadvantages? Very likely. But we have some evidence that a taste for a proper modern style on the part of the architects made a close replacement impossible. The local authorities were committed to flats:

> In discussing with the relevant officers the reasons for choosing flats as a form of development in Sunderland the interviewer was told that "high-rise blocks are essential to the skyline of the town." Seven blocks of 16-storied flats were built at Gilley Law, on the outskirts of the town, as a result of an "aesthetic choice."

The mind boggles at the thought of sixteen-story apartment houses in Sunderland, where the top density of the area to be cleared (two-story houses) was only sixty-eight rooms per acre. Most of the rehousing was to be done in modest three-story flats. Yet the residents still opposed that.

So we can well understand why many of the people of Sunderland preferred to stay in their old houses and their old neighborhoods. They even argued their disadvantages were advantages. The fact that the main window was right on the pavement, they said, meant more "privacy." "Passers-by don't get the chance to look in—they are past too quickly."

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We understand that everyone prefers a place of his own, with his own front and backyard. We also understand that when we build at the high densities of large cities not everyone can have them. But consider a dense city, such as Manhattan. We find that even the commercially built housing of New York City, that would appear on the face of it much less desirable than the Sunderland cottages, also had virtues that new housing could not provide.

The plan for Manhattan has been denounced by every sophisticated planner. As Lewis Mumford, and others, argued, the checkerboard plan was designed for easy marketing of properties. With streets and avenues coming at fixed intervals, each block was the same size, and each could be reduced to the same property modules for easy marketing—no odd-sized lots, and modules could be cumulated for larger property sizes. And so the peculiar Manhattan block, with its long and narrow street side, its short side on a wide avenue, broken into twenty-by-one-hundred-foot building lots. The plan required no sophistication—no diagonal streets, no adaptation to topography. And it turned out utilizing it for commercial building required no sophistication either. The brownstone town house was invented for the upper middle classes, and put up by the thousands; the tenement and other apartment houses were invented for the working classes, and put up by the thousands. For grandeur, a few lots were put together for the town houses of Fifth Avenue, and later for huge apartment houses, a half-block or block in size, on Park Avenue and on other avenues.

No one has ever had a good word for this non-design, this simple adaptation to market needs—until we started tearing it down. Then we discovered that the brownstone provided wonderful living quarters, even when it was broken down to house a half-dozen or more families; that the tenements, once the severe overcrowding was overcome—that is generally the single most serious problem in housing for the poor—also provided good living space. For a child growing up in these tenements, there was really no serious problem except crowding. The street side of the tenement provided life, variety, play spaces around stoops, even play spaces in the streets, before the traffic became heavy. Marbles could be rolled along the curbside—I was always mystified at how kids could play marbles without a convenient curb along which to roll them. On the other side of the house were the quiet backyards. They even had trees. Despite the crowding in the tenements, these backyards, completely surrounded by buildings that by law could not occupy the entire building space, and cut off on all sides from street and avenue, were quiet. These interior spaces are still surprisingly quiet in the midst of the noise of Manhattan—if, that is, people are not playing their radios.

Two kinds of structure have replaced them, insofar as they have been

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replaced for residential purposes rather than commercial and business purposes: we have public housing projects, built tall to reserve the largest amount of space for greenery and parking and to open up the apartments to more light and air; and more crowded, unsubsidized apartment houses, built on a huge scale compared to the old brownstones and tenements, on large plots. The former reflect public decisions, partially unconstrained by market costs; the latter represent market decisions under a variety of constraints that are more severe than those that limited the earlier buildings. Both, I would argue, have provided worse living quarters than were provided earlier.

The story I have told is not one confined to New York City. Herbert Gans, in his well-known book *The Urban Villagers*, describes the tenements of the West End of Boston, the area adjacent to Massachusetts General Hospital, before it was torn down to be replaced by tall, modern apartment houses. The houses of the West End were quite similar to those in the tenement areas of New York, except that the buildings were somewhat lower and smaller. If we look at the pictures in *The Urban Villagers*, we find units not very different from Little Italy in New York or the West Village tenements. Again, once the overcrowding of poverty was overcome, the people living there found their condition perfectly satisfactory—indeed, more than satisfactory. They resisted fiercely being driven out of their homes for new development for others.

Of course their satisfaction—as is the satisfaction of the brownstone and tenement dwellers of New York—was not provided only or perhaps not even primarily by the design of their houses. One must take into account that they had lived there a long time and had their shopping places and churches and friends and relatives nearby. They also paid low rents for their older quarters. But I would insist that there were aspects of *design* in these apparently undesigned working-class areas that provided these satisfactions: they had one or three neighbors on an entry, rather than twenty or thirty; they were closer to the ground, in three-, four-, and five-story buildings, and could watch their children at play, or call to them; they had enclosed semi-private open space—not in this case for them individually, of course, but still space in the backyards that provided a different and quiet experience—as well as public space, which the towers-in-a-park design of public housing, as well as unsubsidized apartment towers, could not provide.

The point is not to praise the commercially minded builder, who is of course concerned with cutting costs to the bone and getting the best return on his money. It is rather to force us to ponder the comparison between thoughtlessness and sophistication in design at the point where it should most favor the sophisticated; to consider why private building for the incredibly poor workers of the past was superior to the public building of our more prosperous societies for more prosperous people.

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Values in design that are significant for human satisfaction seem to have been ignored by the sophisticated. They were cavalier about the characteristics and satisfactions of old neighborhoods. They were all too ready to wipe away what existed and start with a clean slate—many preferred to do this and objected to the costs of retaining some of the old and integrating it with the new. They were attached to forms, whether the high tower or the flats that look like factories or machines for living. It has been, it is my impression, not architects but their critics—as well as resisting homeowners, tenants, and residents of old areas—who have limited mass clearance and have sparked as much rehabilitation as we have. It was not the architects who advocated rehabilitation, though to my mind rehabilitation offers designers wonderful opportunities.

Most significantly, designers failed to explore just what it is people find attractive in areas and buildings for whose design characteristics not much if anything can be said. How often have we seen those pictures of endless Levittowns, little houses with scarcely grown trees spread out endlessly, as horrible lessons to avoid? And how often have we contrasted them—to their disadvantage—with gleaming visions of great towers? Let us put to one side for a moment the economic arguments that require density; and let us recognize that very often the density and overall cost of single-family homes packed closely, or low-lying apartments, would compare favorably with twenty-story apartment towers. I will not enter into the argument of comparative costs, which is in any case complicated, but we all know that studies have shown that the advantages are not always in one direction, and that often "an aesthetic choice"—to quote from the Sunderland investigation—a choice by either public authorities, designers, or commercial builders, dictates height.

So let us go back to the contrast without worrying about the economics: Levittown on one side; and on the other striking apartment towers, and they have recently been striking indeed—serpentine on the outskirts of Paris, inverted pyramids on the outskirts of Rome, or spiky concentrations of concrete on the hills of Jerusalem. Whatever criticism the architect or critic may have of the latter, they are at least "interesting." But let us look at the contrast ten or twenty years after they are completed. In Levittown the trees have grown; various types of fences wall in back and front yards; some buildings sprout additions on top, some on the side; with the children gone, rooms are being remodeled from bedrooms to libraries, and so on and so on. The apartment towers one suspects show no such opportunities for change. How could they, since their residents have so little power over their environment? The trees will grow, and the landscaping perhaps improve—if there's money for it, but there won't be much if people don't see it as *theirs*.

Finally, am I saying the architect can't beat Levittown, and that there

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is nothing to his skill, his training, his taste, his occasional genius, that makes up for the ordinary crass effort to provide what people want, in the most immediate sense, at a price they can afford? No, I would not say that, but rather that the architect has not tried hard enough to find out what people liked, and like, whether in old slums or new developments, and to see what his skills could do to satisfy, build on, and improve upon that, even though there are some remarkable and admirable exceptions. I admit it is more fun to explore Greek islands and Italian hill towns than American slums and suburbs, but there is as much to learn in the latter as the former.

Wherever social scientists examine these things, they find a taste that architects on the whole do not find it interesting to satisfy, a taste for the low-rise, the small scale, the unit that gives some privacy, some control, some access to the ground, a small piece of land wholly under one's control. I am not of course describing a universal taste. But for people raising children—and indeed many others—it is a near universal taste, if people have a choice. Nor is there any reason to think that it is necessary or desirable that people be educated *against* that taste, and develop a new taste for a larger, or gargantuan scale. On occasion, conditions seem to make what most people want impossible, particularly in the very largest cities. New tastes are developed, and people find it is possible to adapt to tall blocks and greater density—many have, and many more will have to. Even when we adapt to such necessities there are things to learn from how people live and use space that we have not yet learned. Nor am I convinced that the exigencies of finances or the requirements of ordinances and laws will make it impossible to provide environments people find more satisfactory.

The sociologist considering what people like and what they find satisfactory is likely to appear a real spoilsport to architects and designers, a rather glum soul who first tells us that they prefer their old buildings—any old buildings—to new ones, and secondly that even when you drive them out of their old buildings and they agree there is something nice in something new, it tends to be a homey, fussy, dowdy single-family house they prefer, rather than sparkling towers of interesting shapes or modernist structures of glass and aluminum. After all, architects and designers want to soar, both to build and design great things, new and not yet imagined things, and are we to confine them by what the ordinary man prefers and insists upon?

Well, to begin with, in a modern consumer society, the ordinary man will eventually get what he wants—unless it is being provided by central government, heavily subsidized, and being given to him whether he wants it or not, as in the case of council housing blocks in England or public housing in the United States. In both countries, we are now

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dynamiting the tall blocks that were once the admired model for family housing only twenty or thirty years ago. But second, the architect and designer can still soar, because there are many more structures in the world than those required to house people and provide them with an urban environment. After all, historically the architect and designer has only soared when he built for the rich, for the state, for the church. He still can—if these clients will let him—and in addition he now has a very substantial client who wants things big and striking, the corporation rearing its towers. Not that he should or could ignore what people want in working environments, or convening environments, or even worshipping environments, but everyone accepts the symbolic role of such structures, and one can break out without the need for an economical accommodation of needs.

And, of course, there are other ways of soaring, of building big—and once again one thinks of the Greek isles and Italian hill towns and Moroccan cities, in which an organized approach to building, added to bit by bit over time, has created environments to which people cling, and which delight the eyes and souls of architects and designers. But if we are to expect the accumulation of small-scale environments—and basically what I have been talking about is the virtue of the small scale—to cumulate into grand structures and environments, we probably need more changes in our society than I can envisage. Christopher Alexander and his associates have made a heroic effort to establish such a way of building for our day, in which more or less anonymous action produces large and substantial effects, and it is an effort that must arouse our sympathy and awe, even if we recognize its problems. Perhaps there is still a way for the architect, without becoming—as so many modern form-makers have insisted—the dictator of an environment to provide a process, a set of tools, a mechanism whereby individual action can cumulate to great harmonious wholes. But the only way of doing that, in the absence of dictators, is through a steady and dedicated concern with how people live, what they want, what they find desirable and attractive, and what they find troublesome and inconvenient. This has to be done before one builds, while one builds, after one builds, and, if the great scheme that says, Isn't it delightful to put everyone into a great triangle, or obelisk, or a sphere? has to collapse under this investigation—so be it. We can always put it in drawings.

Little by little, is, I suspect, in the modern world, the answer, not only in building, but in public policy, where many great schemes have come crashing down.

Pondering his study of Sunderland, which he began with the easy optimistic belief that well-trained planners and designers know best, Norman Dennis was driven to another conclusion. He writes:

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As Edmund Burke said in another connection, the high level of satisfaction in areas like [the ones scheduled to be torn down] is the result of a choice not of one day or one set of people. . . . It is made by the peculiar circumstances, occasion, tempers, dispositions and moral, civil, and social habitudes of the people which disclose themselves only in a long period of time.

And again and finally from Burke: "If circumspection and caution are part of wisdom, when we work only on inanimate matter, surely they become part of duty too, when the subject of our demolition and construction is not bricks and timber, but sentient being. The true lawgiver"—and I would add, the architect and designer too—"ought to love and respect his kind, and to fear himself."

It is this point of view, not lack of architectural expertise, that connects the Prince with the ordinary people, and divides him from his architect critics.

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The Cradle of Modernism

JACQUES BARZUN

TWO THINGS BESIDES FATIGUE account for the radical shift in outlook away from Romanticism and for the extraordinary animus, the angry revulsion, the indignant scorn with which the next generations treated the movement. One is the revolutions of 1848; the other is the collapse of philosophy from an inadequate idealism into a crude materialism. Poets have no obligation to be philosophers and few of them read philosophy, but most if not all absorb the new doctrines in the air of their time and these affect their work, both the contents and the form.

Eighteen-forty-eight in France and its four-year sequel of uprisings all over Europe toppled thrones, caused repression, civil wars, executions and exiles, and finally brought on an eighteen-year dictatorship under a nephew of Napoleon in the country where Liberal democracy had first sought to establish itself. Those events broke the back of the century culturally and emotionally. Many artists died or fled from their homelands, promising careers were ruined, and perhaps worst of all, intellectuals were discredited on the one hand and disillusioned on the other.

Every generous idea previously accepted was now despised and, in fact, blamed for failure to bring about the better world. Love, liberty, progress, the sovereign people, the brotherhood of man, and the oneness of spirit under a mysterious but manifest providence—these were now regarded as the vaporings of feeble minds or glib rhetoricians. What was true was hard matter and evil man, nothing else. Science confirmed the first of these sole realities, politics the other. Hence Realism and Materialism: "Things are in the saddle, / And ride mankind."

Realism, moreover, was defined as the commonplace, the dull, dreary, sordid repetitious occurrences of daily life. They made anything other than soberness of word and feeling ridiculous. To be sure, the

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Romanticists had often felt despair; they were not fools—or blind. But their love of life was strong, and they were also gifted with the love of love; those among them who survived the debacle of 1848 kept their faith in humankind and felt it a duty to continue the fight for political freedom and social equality. Hugo, exiled on his Channel Island for eighteen years, was the chief spokesman for this "Nevertheless" attitude and thereby earned the contempt of the younger men who *knew* that ideas were "mere" ideas and worthless. He continued to love and worship nature; they, on the contrary, were possessed by the emotion that Roger Williams has described and analyzed in his book *The Horror of Life* and has shown by psychological and medical evidence to have been no affectation but fact.

The future is always the work of the young among survivors; the horror of life was bound to prevail over hope and the vision of a new Jerusalem. I am speaking here of culture—mood, tone, and forms of expression. The political battle, under and above ground, is another story. The first post-Romantics were the so-called Parnassians. Their name comes from a periodical, *Le Parnasse contemporain,* which from 1866 on published the poets that set the new standards. Their leader was Leconte de Lisle and their creed was "objectivity." The poet was to see and describe—a kind of scientist—keeping his feelings and notions to himself. As Leconte put it in a sonnet called *Les Montreurs* (The Exhibitionists), writers who give away their emotions and opinions are to be classed with mountebanks and prostitutes *(les histrions et les prostituées).* Hugo, Musset, Lamartine, please take note.

But what was the true kind of poem to contain? Leconte gave the answer in his *Poèmes antiques, Poèmes barbares,* and *Poèmes tragiques.* The subjects are scenes from history, distant in time or remote in space. Insight into the mind is not excluded, but the mind is that of somebody other than the poet. As if to make his point even plainer, Leconte took up the learned fad of spelling ancient Greek names "correctly": *Clytemnestre* written *Klytaemnestra* and well-known words such as *houri* and *houkah* transmogrified into *hûri* and *hûka* seemed to establish at once distance and scientific scholarship.

In form, the changes from Hugo-esque technique are matters of degree: rhymes are less rich, to be less conspicuous, the rhythm more sedate, and the images make a shorter leap from reality. As a whole, Leconte's versification may be called a return to Chénier by way of Vigny. The detachment is more in the manner than the substance. For example:

> Homme, si, le coeur plein de joie ou d'amertume,
> Tu passais vers midi dans les champs radieux,

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Fuis! La nature est vide et le soleil consume:
Rien n'est vivant ici, rien n'est triste ou joyeux.*

That here was no counter-revolution in artistry is evident from the interesting fact that Théodore de Banville, whose *Short Treatise on French Poetry* in 1872 made Hugo the unsurpassable example, the complete poet, was one of the older Parnassians. And his light ironic verse, brilliant in technique, exquisite in detail, and subdued in lyric impulse, does show that the fervor of an earlier day had vanished.

But human passion—especially in poets—is not to be turned on and off like a tap. In this grim period of the mid-nineteenth century, it burst out in *Les Fleurs du mal*, the perfect expression of "the horror of life." Baudelaire himself calls them on his dedication page *"ces fleurs maladives,"* which means not so much sickly flowers as "flowers of sickness." His technique remains that of the Romanticists; it is in his appearance of "objectivity" that he is connected with the Parnassians.

The novelty of his book resides in a triple contrast: the express desire for *ordre et beauté, Luxe, calme et volupté*;† descriptions of sordidness or vice linked with love or ideal yearnings; and, in manner, a deliberate deadness in the utterance, a drugged quality in the rhythm, matched in the rhyming by attempts at richness that often fail. Indeed, flaccid or banal polysyllables at the end of his second lines suggest the urge to avoid eloquence. The truth is, Baudelaire found rhyming difficult; he pairs the same type or form of words or is content with what is hardly more than assonance. He uses inversion to avoid rhythmic difficulties at the cesura, and his vocabulary is scanty. Where he innovates is in using these limitations, purposeful or not, to serve his purpose: creating memorable poetic lines by imitating the ghastly reality, the ubiquitous prose. What Hugo and Musset used for special effects turns into a style. Faults and merits in Baudelaire beautifully come together to communicate that unmistakable atmosphere of the new realism, of experience narrowed by unhappiness, that the age took on as its character.

The alexandrine is Baudelaire's prevailing line (in 131 out of 167 pieces) and he freely mixes the binary and ternary meters in the same verse:

Pourtant, qui n'a serré dans ses bras un squelette. . . . ††

* O man! if with a heart full of joy or bitterness / You should at noontime cross the radiant fields, / Flee! Nature is a void and the sun burns away: / Nothing here is alive, nothing sad or joyful *(Poèmes antiques, "Midi")*.

† Order and Beauty, / The sumptuous, repose, and the voluptuous *(L'Invitation au voyage)*.

†† Yet who ever has not clasped in his arms a skeleton. . . .

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The first accent comes at the comma and the next at the ninth and twelfth syllables, but the regular cesura at the sixth is still perceptible.

Among forms, Baudelaire exploits the sonnet, also in alexandrines, where his design of juxtaposing fair and foul stands out with violent effect. His whole output is violent, like his nature. He fired one shot at random in the revolution of 1848 and tried in vain to gather a squad who would join him in killing the stepfather he hated. That was all the fury he expressed physically. But in his verse, the very succession of titles in his book shows his repressed rage: "Hymn to Beauty"; "A Rotting Carcass"; "Love and the Skull"; "Elevation"; "The Sick Muse"; "Journey to Cythera"; "The Barrel of Hatred." I cite at random, but the hate turned inward is evident; it appears again in the suicidal moments of his life early and late.

In the poetry it produced those sudden turns for which he is famous: a ten-line address to his mistress begins by calling her "a vessel of sadness" and ends by comparing his erotic exertions upon her to the onslaught of "a chorus of worms upon a cadaver." In turn, this comparison bespeaks "her coldness, which to him makes her the more beautiful." Like all the post-Romantics, Baudelaire is a specialist. He works with but a few images and exploits three or four recurring themes.

In reading Baudelaire, one soon discovers another trait that marks the break with the past: his world is urban. He takes pains to point out that the great forests frighten him; he hates the ocean, because it reminds him of his own inner tumult and shows

> . . . l'homme vaincu, plein de sanglots et d'insultes*

The city it is that gives rise to the comprehensive word for the unrelieved Baudelairean experience: "Spleen." Its connotation in French is depression; it is not tender like melancholy, nor does it carry the idea of resentment as does English "spleen." The soul is weary; every small accident underscores the hopeless, meaningless, and unchangeable character of human life; whence the horror of it. Here is the opening of the first of the three famous "Spleen" poems:

> J'ai plus de souvenirs que si j'avais mille ans.
> Un gros meuble à tiroirs encombré de bilans,
> De vers, de billets doux, de procès, de romances,
> Avec de lourds cheveux roulés dans des quittances,
> Cache moins de secrets que mon triste cerveau.†

* . . . Man defeated, full of tears and loaded with insults.

† I remember more things than if I were a thousand years old. / A large bureau with many drawers full of balance sheets, / Verses, love letters, lawsuits, and parlor songs / With heavy tresses rolled up in receipted bills / Contains fewer secrets than my sorry brain. / op. cit.

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The other two begin, respectively, with: "I am like the king of a rainy country" and "When the sky is low and heavy like a lid."

No doubt is left about the moral climate in which everything in Baudelaire's world takes place. The clearings in this dark weather come in the form of *imagined* relief, longed for, and not for a moment to be thought real. *L'Invitation au voyage* is but a dream; "Beauty" exists only in the minds of poets; and the "ideal being" for *this* poet is explicitly a fierce "red ideal," none other than Lady Macbeth, because she is capable of crime; or Michaelangelo's figure, "Night of the Tomb" in Florence, who "sleeps in a strange posture," her physical attractions "fashioned by the mouths of Titans."

All these images, these mixed desires, coupled with erotic experiences both voluptuous and sordid, explain why Baudelaire has become for many English readers the first French poet they admire after Villon. Baudelaire satisfies the hatred of modern society felt by sensitive natures and he records the fruitless yearnings that seem to be best expressed in poetry by more or less explicit reference to sexuality and its perversions.

This aspect of *Les Fleurs du mal* is discreet enough by twentieth-century standards; it was outrageous by nineteenth, and it qualified the book for prosecution in the courts. What aggravated the offense was the rather complacent expression of remorse sheltering under the religious doctrine of fallen man. This combination, too, of enormities described with a varnish of religiosity added, became a leading motif of subsequent literature down to the present.

In retrospect, the work of the Parnassians, crowned by Baudelaire's achievement, appears as what I have called specialization. The new school took from the Romanticists not only verse technique, but also whatever else in their work it found congenial, adaptable to their spiritually crushed condition—despair, stoicism, love cynically flouted, images of violence and sordidness, compassion for the downtrodden. By concentrating the dose, the effect was made overwhelming and seemed a new departure. Hugo was the first to acknowledge it when he said of Baudelaire that he had created *le frisson nouveau*—the new thrill—this in no disparaging sense. By affirming an anti-social attitude, it was indeed new—it was alienation declared by the poet for the benefit of all who have the wit to feel the horror of life and to see through the fallacy of progress.

For yet another cause of unhappiness was the encroachment of machine industry and its attendant uglification of town and country. The Romanticists had sung in an agrarian civilization; towns were for handiwork and commerce. Industry brought in not factories only, and railroads, but also the city—slums, crowds, a new type of filth, and

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shoddy goods, commonly known as "cheap and nasty." And when free public schools were forced on the nation by the needs of industry, a further curse was added: the daily paper, also cheap.

This last item sounds like a tired joke, but one must read Baudelaire to see how seriously it is to be taken. The newspaper was his bête noire; he railed at it, called it Satanic. He loathed it not as a symbol but as a fact and a force. The reason for this animus was that the penny paper created what has since been called the mass mind. The schools, by teaching reading and writing, produced the half-educated; and *their* newspaper—its language, clichés, "sensations," and illustrations—kept the populace in the state of vulgarity and opinionativeness that forever prevented their becoming civilized.

The poet, the artist, was thereby displaced, even in his own eyes. He was no longer the hero, the seer and prophet who leads a grateful people to a higher spiritual life. He was now an outcast—*maudit* (accursed), doomed to misery, poverty, disease, and death. Baudelaire celebrates wine and opium and women as providers of *paradis artificiels*. From his day onward it has been the expected thing that artists should end not triumphant in palaces but outcast in the charity hospital and the pauper's grave.

The contradiction of the superior man in the inferior place heightens the disgust with self, while at the same time it reveals as part of the artist's resentment the ambition for high status and power. The upshot in poetry is the paradox of compassion expressed for "the people" and hostility to democracy and its material betterment. Thus, in one of his *Little Poems in Prose* Baudelaire speaks of the pleasures of "taking a bath in the populace. To enjoy the crowd is an art." His urban intelligence perceives that "multitude and solitude—it is all one." But in another such prose poem entitled "Let us beat up the poor," Baudelaire makes up a parable about economic and social equality: no one is entitled to it; it belongs to those who can win it and keep it. And he taunts the social reformer: "What do you think of that, Proudhon?"

Baudelaire's aim in his prose poems was in keeping with his rejection of anything suggestive of pure delight; the desire for it must be balked or adulterated by the sordid or at least the commonplace. As he said, "We have all been longing for the miracle of a poetic prose, musical but without rhythm or rhyme, flexible enough yet jagged enough to adapt itself to the lyrical impulses of the soul, the wave-like motions of reverie, and the upheavals of conscience." In these short pieces the poet treats again some of the themes of his verse. For example: "One must be always drunk, . . . so as not to feel the horrible burden of Time, which crushes your shoulders and bends your spine toward the Earth. . . . " Others are sui generis—anecdotes exploiting the bizarre or using lan-

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guage several degrees below the level that his already colloquial lines would accommodate.

Whether all the fifty poems answer to his description is a question. Some of the prose has a perceptible rhythm; other parts of it are flat indeed and do not express any lyric impulse, reverie, or fit of conscience. The aesthetics of the prose poem cannot, by its nature, be defined; it is a genre, not a form. At one extreme the poetic pulls toward incantation and at the other, the prosaic toward (let it be said with all due respect to Baudelaire) journalism. What remains clear is that Baudelaire's prose poems are, again, city pieces. The epilogue in verse he appended to them confirms the fact: the poet has climbed the hill from which he can see the whole town—"hospital, brothel, purgatory, hell, prison"—and he concludes: *Je t'aime, ô capitale infâme!*—"I love you, O squalid capital!"

One cannot speak of Baudelaire, the prose poem, and the idea of specialized concentration in poetry without also speaking of Poe. English and American critics have spent valuable thought wondering why the French poets of the last half of the nineteenth century were so enamored of the American. The critics consider him a negligible figure—inferior as poet, and in his fiction, at best a writer of popular entertainment. Yet after Baudelaire translated his tales and disseminated his ideas about poetry coupled with his loathing of the populace, Edgar Poe (as the French call him and as he was in fact known to his American contemporaries) became a great force in French poetics and literature generally. He was cited again and again as a farsighted innovator in theory and practice; Mallarmé translated "The Raven" and wrote a sonnet for the Poe monument in Baltimore, a companion sonnet to the one for Baudelaire. It would be shameful, says Mallarmé, if "our thought" did not sculp

Un bas-relief
Dont la tombe de Poë éblouissante s'orne*

The key to the riddle of this hero worship is simple: it lies in the fifteen pages of Poe's essay entitled "The Philosophy of Composition," which purports to tell how the author composed "The Raven." Because the critics think poorly of "The Raven" and do not believe Poe wrote it as he says he did, they neglect the "philosophy" stated in the opening pages. It consists of two main points: a poem can only be short—long poems are made up of short bursts of true poetry tied together with prosy verse; and a true poem is not the product of inspiration but of careful, cold-blooded contriving.

* A bas-relief / With which to decorate Poe's dazzling tomb *(Le Tombeau d'Edgar Poë)*.

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These principles appealed immediately to the post-Romantic generation that wondered, among other things, what could be done after Lamartine, Musset, Hugo, and Vigny had manifestly exhausted every scheme and idea. Poe insists on originality—it is, he says, a powerful means of catching the reader's interest. The modern cult of the New dates from those words, to which Poe adds, in italics, an expression of surprise "that for centuries, no man, in verse, has ever done, or ever seemed to think of doing, an original thing." And less emphatically, almost casually, Poe states another principle: that a story gains immensely in artistry if it concentrates on a single episode and produces a single effect by taking care to use language adapted to the unique atmosphere.

In thus defining his invention, the short story (as against any tale that happens to be short), Poe was not only giving a formula applicable to the kind of poem he desiderated, but he was, indirectly, justifying the prose poem. A unified, "atmospheric" piece such as "The Fall of the House of Usher" may be seen as a prose poem. The tales Baudelaire translated were in their effect prose poems about a strange world. When, moreover, Poe's life became known—his struggles, his neglect by the public, his weaknesses and wretched death—the literary world in France added fellow feeling to reasoned admiration.

That these distant followers of a congenial doctrine failed to assess as we do the worth of Poe's poetry is not to the point. Rather, the adoption of that doctrine, like its emergence in America in Poe, a keen reader of European letters, shows that it answered a need of the times, not just an isolated quest.

No less important in the circumstances was the idea of Beauty. Poe considers it not a quality but an effect: the "intense and pure elevation of *soul—not* of intellect or of heart." Beauty is "the province of the poem," and its contemplation is the highest, purest pleasure. Poets have always wanted their works to be beautiful, but the beauty they attained was a mixed product, born of other concerns—panegyric, dramatic, erotic, satirical, elegiac, in a word, social. Now beauty had become a necessity for the human being as such, to *escape* the social, to live by contemplating it pure, to forget the concerns of intellect and heart, and receive from art the only pleasure left in a degraded world.

Poe's expression of these ideas paralleled and confirmed those gaining ground among European artists. In France, Verlaine was preaching against eloquence in poetry—"wring its neck!"—and urging *De la musique avant toute chose.* In England Walter Pater was making a theory out of the tendency: *all* the arts must tend toward the nature of music, that is, significant beauty without articulate meaning, or in Verlaine's creed again, only the indefinite and suggestive. As for life, it

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was to be spent in a search for moments of intense contemplation in the presence of beauty. In a word, aestheticism was the latest phase of culture; the word itself dates from 1855 and the critic who first applied it to a poem, disparagingly, defined it: "It is music and picture, and nothing more."

This temper was liberating. For the artist, the daily world was exorcised; the real world was the Elsewhere. For the beholder of art, the symbol in Symbolism gave free room to the imagination wearied by the explicitness of previous art. As Rémy de Gourmont declared with the double authority of poet and critic, a poem by Mallarmé is whatever any reader makes it, even a different poem on different evenings, *selon le sentiment du moment.* The notion that literature does not consist of fixed texts is no recent discovery; it is exactly one hundred years old.

But once again, the contemplative ideal could not subdue the common passions; aestheticism and Symbolism did not prove a lasting refuge from the world. Though Verlaine never abandoned his ideal nor transgressed its language, he wholeheartedly encouraged Rimbaud, who did both. As early as 1871, after the uprising and massacre of the Paris Commune, Rimbaud wrote a poem that says: "Europe, Asia, America: perish!" Begin by "overthrowing all order." But at the end the poet despairs: he himself "is still around."

This is the voice of those who deserve the name of Abolitionists, the promoters of the clean sweep. They are a numerous band, from Rimbaud and Lautréamont down to Jarry, Tailhade and on to Marinetti, Tzara, and the Surrealists. Many of them take their ire out on language itself, breaking up grammar and syntax like the Symbolists, but with a different purpose, which can be seen in the mingling of the fragments with the colloquial and the obscene. Modern poetry is thus able to fuse complaint with denunciation, yearn for the Elsewhere, and produce "Realism" bearing the stamp of 1848. For all the talk of pure art and the saving grace of beauty, literature since Baudelaire has been valued to the degree that it has repudiated contemporary life and done its part in denying the worth of life itself.

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Glow

BRAD LEITHAUSER

Given a day
that opened in a brilliant show
of sea-washed sun,
one might naturally have predicted—
this being Reykjavík—that we'd have snow
before the day was done;
snow, anyway,

is what we get,
with winds whipped to a low-grade squall
and the bay drowned
in whitecaps. Shoulders up, chin lowered,
hands pocketed, I'm shuffling fast, like all
those few who haven't found
their shelter yet,

when something queer
in a window across the street,
a gold-green glow,
lights like a signal and I stop,
turn, look, squint, lose it in another sheet
of snow. . . . And that's all—though
it would appear

the thing demands
a closer look—but who's to know?
I hesitate,
weighing an urge for puzzle solving
against the weather, then decide I'll go
over to investigate. . . .
The window stands

just a few feet
from the slush-piled sidewalk, and near
enough to study
the cacti forest on the sill

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in all its intricate, delicate, clear-
cut beauty. Now anybody
who'd crossed the street

on such a day,
summoned by some *What could that be?*
would likely feel
near-duty-bound to look these over;
but duty's not, in fact, required of me—
the vision they reveal
(basking away

beneath the sun
of an unseen ceiling spotlight,
its prising touch
unearthing greens whose deepness hints
at some remote and all but weather-tight
felicity) is such
a striking one.

* * *

As the snowflakes
shiver and rap against the glass,
the eye delights
in going where the hand could not—
spiraling down a needle-strung crevasse,
it halts, adjusts its sights,
and lightly makes

a little jump,
negotiates a passage through
dense battle lines
of live barbed wire, then takes another
leap, and, a tranquil end sprung into view,
ascends a spine of spines
up to the plump,

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towering tip,
whose fine-toothed, clockwork blossom
may,
with time, unwind
itself. For all their independent
rigor, the cacti seem to share a way
of life, a breadth, a kind
of fellowship. . . .

* * *

Enough—the rain
of snow pools on the windowsill.
It's late. The street
grows dark. Time to be off, although
there's time for one more mental snapshot (still
hoping to freeze their heat
upon the brain);

and time enough,
as well, for noticing how rich,
tier upon tier,
are the resources the mind brings
to even its littlest joys, like this, in which
a worldly inner ear
thrills to a rough-

tongued wonder as
a breathless inner voice exclaims,
How strong they look!

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Literary Widows

DONNA RIFKIND

IN THE HOUSE OF LITERATURE there are many anterooms. Let's suppose, for instance, that we find ourselves in the most public of this stately house's rooms, the parlor. While the great writer is busy working upstairs, here, milling around, are the various people who play subsidiary roles in that writer's life: in one corner stand family members and close friends; in another, deep in conference, are editors, publishers, agents; also present are journalists, photographers, protégés, miscellaneous admirers and hangers-on, and, perhaps, taking notes in an alcove, the writer's official biographer.

After sampling a canapé or two, you might gradually become aware of a particular undercurrent of noise drifting through the room, an ostensibly polite, steady background hum. This is the hum of rumor and speculation about all the extracurricular details crowding behind the *solitary work of literary production. It is a hum generated by intense* interest—most often malicious—in a writer's private life. It is the hum, in short, of the politics of literary celebrity.

Now, to complicate this parlor game, imagine that we are in this crowded room at a particular time—the time, say, right after the great writer has died. The corpse and corpus lie in state elsewhere, finished, untouchable; this is a room for the living and the changeable, for murmurs of genuine sorrow and transparent sycophancy, for the complex, messy business of summing up a life and putting it in perspective.

By the window, near the table on which rests the sherry, stands the person who presides over this scene. She is the person who, having seen to the decoration and cleaning of this parlor and the rest of the great writer's house, having provided his inspiration, raised his children, typed his manuscripts, offered critical advice, protected him from excess publicity, and nursed him through his last illness, is now in a position to be the subject of this essay: the writer's widow.

Why bother with the writer's widow? Isn't this one of those subjects that prurient biographers are always chewing over, insisting that it sheds

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light, whether bright or dim, on the author's work? Perhaps. But one reason to take a careful look at writers' widows is that they themselves are a juicy literary subject. The very word *widow* is full of drama: one thinks immediately of black lace mantillas, of legacies and lawyers, of hoarded letters and battles over access to them. One thinks of the small but compelling literary subgenre devoted to tales about the wish to control a dead writer's reputation, among them *The Aspern Papers* and *Pale Fire*. Such a subject speaks to the invariably interesting question of the durability of literary celebrity—of the ways a writer's work manages or fails to remain alive to the reading public after his death. Sometimes, though not as often as one might think, this has something to do with the success of the author's widow in keeping the flame of that literary reputation burning.

When I speak of the writer's widow as a general phenomenon, one might naturally assume that I am thinking only of those dead authors who are male. There have of course been notable literary widowers as well: Leonard Woolf and John Middleton Murry (the husband of Katherine Mansfield) come quickly to mind. There are all kinds of widows—and widowers—whom I will have, for reasons of length, to overlook: for example, widows who have themselves had their own careers in the literary world, such as Mary Shelley or Diana Trilling; or homosexual partners who have outlived their literary "spouses"; or widows of men involved in arts other than literature, such as Gertrud Schoenberg or Olgivanna, the widow of Frank Lloyd Wright. I have also overlooked women who performed many of the duties of wife and widow when they were in fact not married to the writer in question; one well-known example is William Wordworth's sister Dorothy, whose total dedication to her brother's personal and professional life in some ways exceeded that of Mary Hutchinson, the poet's wife.

Literary biography has tended to provide a harsh view of the writer's widow. Often perceived as a suspicious, venal shrew, arguing endlessly over copyrights and royalties, she is traditionally maligned as a stumbling block between the author's oeuvre and his adoring readers. And when she is not maligned, the writer's widow is satirized, made to look ridiculous for her willingness to be attached, Nora Barnacle-like, to the underside of an author's career; and then, when that career is over, to submit herself to the unrewarded task of preserving that career in the public imagination.

Probably the most famous example of this kind of satire was Somerset Maugham's *Cakes and Ale*, published in 1930. Although Maugham at first vigorously denied it, the book was widely recognized upon publication as a vicious portrait of Thomas Hardy (who had died two years earlier) and Florence Dugdale Hardy, his second wife. In the *Saturday*

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Review of Literature, J. B. Priestley commented, shortly after the novel's publication, that "if Maugham did not intend his readers to be reminded of Hardy, then he acted with strange stupidity (and a less stupid man than Somerset Maugham never set pen to paper)." Priestley went on, nearly licking his chops at the prospect, to "anticipate a cheerful row." And he was not disappointed. Reviews of *Cakes and Ale* carried titles that expressed the general outrage: "Trampling on Thomas Hardy's Grave," "Hitting Below the Shroud," "Grave Profaned by Literary Ghoul." Maugham, of course, delighted in the notoriety, and watched the sales figures for his book mount as the publicity increased.

Maugham's chief satirical objective in *Cakes and Ale* was to expose the absurdly wide margin between the public's fantasy of an exalted writer's life and the vulgar, even pathetic details of that writer's existence. The great author in *Cakes and Ale*, Edward Driffield, had been in his youth a rather buffoonish character, a banjo-playing, pub-dwelling native of the seaside town of Blackstable (actually, in Hardy's case, Dorchester), whose first wife, a former barmaid, had left him for a bounder. Driffield makes it grandly as a novelist, enters fashionable society, and marries his young secretary, Amy, who cares for him until his death at the age of eighty-four. The book's narrator, a younger writer named Ashenden who had known Driffield and his first wife at Blackstable when he was a boy, describes Driffield near the end of his life:

> He looked an old, old man, hanging on to mortality by a thread; he wore very white false teeth and they made his smile seem forced and stiff. I had never seen him but bearded, and his lips were thin and pallid. He was dressed in a new, well-cut suit of blue serge, and his low collar, two or three sizes too large for him, showed a wrinkled, scraggy neck. He wore a neat black tie with a pearl in it. He looked a little like a dean in mufti on his summer holiday in Switzerland.

It was as clear to readers in 1930 as it is today that all these details add up to a full-scale attack on the wifely ambitions of the second Mrs. Driffield. Maugham provides a quite horrible picture of helpless old age, in which a weakened man is dressed up like a mannequin to impersonate his philistine wife's notion of a Famous Author. That Driffield in his former years had been a slovenly bohemian adds, of course, to the cruel comedy of his absurd elderly nattiness. Ashenden (speaking, doubtless, for Maugham) hardly bothers to sheathe his claws in describing the Driffields' house, Ferne Court, furnished in "the acme of good taste," with a drawing-room decorated so "exactly as you felt a drawing-room in a country house of modest size should be furnished, that it was slightly disconcerting." Here Driffield entertains high society in the company of "his neatly-turned-out wife, so competent and discreetly managing. . . . I

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wondered if he regretted his early days of adventure. I wondered if all this amused him or if the amiable civility of his manner masked a hideous boredom."

It is after the author dies, however, that Maugham's Amy Driffield comes under heavy vituperative attack. Rather than being condemned for neglecting her husband's reputation, Amy Driffield is mocked, far more cruelly, for her diligence in protecting it. She plays the role of widow as gamely and as unimaginatively as she had played at being Driffield's wife. When a campaign is launched to bury the author in Westminster Abbey, Ashenden notes, "Mrs. Driffield sent a dignified letter to the Press in which she expressed her confidence that she was carrying out the dearest wishes of her dead husband in having him buried among the simple people he knew and loved so well." This is Maugham's opportunity to portray Amy Driffield as a perfectly correct and perfectly insufferable snob, for Ashenden continues: "Unless the notabilities of Blackstable have very much changed since my day, I do not believe they vastly liked that phrase about 'simple people,' but as I afterward learnt, they had never been able to 'abide' the second Mrs. Driffield."

Toward the end of the novel, Ashenden goes to Ferne Court to visit with Amy Driffield. In his description of her life here as the high priestess of the dead author's cult, Maugham's cruelty reaches its apex. "The scene was perfectly set," notes Ashenden. "I do not know why the room seemed so strangely dead; it had already the mustiness of a museum." Ferne Court's drawing-room shouts "decorum" at Ashenden in much the same way as its study had urged "preservation":

> It suited the widow of a distinguished man of letters almost more than it had suited the wife. Those chintzes, those bowls of potpourri, those Dresden China figures—there was about them a faint air of regret; they seemed to reflect pensively upon a past of distinction.

The novel ends with Ashenden going to visit Driffield's seventy-year-old first wife, Rosie, whom everyone had supposed dead but who is alive and living in, of all places, Yonkers, New York. At this point Maugham's satirical tone ends and a strange, perverse sort of sentimentality takes over, as Ashenden reflects on the lusty life of Rosie, with whom he had himself long ago been in love. As a final, behind-the-back slur on Amy Driffield's character, Maugham portrays Rosie as much more authentic, vibrant, and inspirational to Driffield than was his boringly sedulous second wife.

When *Cakes and Ale* first appeared, Thomas Hardy had been dead for two years (he was eighty-seven when he died); Florence Hardy, his

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widow, was fifty-one. Maugham claimed to have met Hardy on only one occasion, at the end of Hardy's life, but there was no question in Florence's mind that Maugham was parodying her life as Hardy's widow. It must have pained her, in 1930, to note the novel's details about her life that were false, but no doubt it was much more painful to read the parts that were purposefully, maliciously true. (For my discussion of Florence Hardy I have relied on Michael Millgate's biography, *Thomas Hardy* [Oxford University Press, 1982]; Mr. Millgate's introduction to *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy* by Thomas Hardy [University of Georgia Press, 1985]; and *The Second Mrs. Hardy* by Robert Gittings and Jo Manton [Heinemann, 1979].)

To appreciate the difficulties of Florence's widowhood, it is necessary briefly to rehearse the story of her marriage to Hardy. Florence Dugdale had met Hardy in the Reading Room of the British Museum while he was still married, unhappily, to his first wife, Emma. ("What very strange marriages literary men seem to make," wrote Fanny Stevenson after a visit to Emma and Thomas Hardy—this from a woman whose own marriage, to Robert Louis Stevenson, was itself far from conventional.) A former schoolteacher with a humble family background who was now dabbling in journalism, Florence agreed to act as Hardy's secretary and became a frequent guest at the Hardys' house, Max Gate, located just southeast of Dorchester. Hardy fell in love with Florence and wooed her for seven years behind Emma's back. When Emma died in 1912, Florence lost no time in moving secretly into Max Gate. She and Hardy were soon married, which created a minor scandal.

All was not bliss. Hardy began perversely to develop an enormous crush on the dead Emma—or, more exactly, on his idealized memory of her. He began to write a series of his loveliest poems dedicated to happy reveries about their early marriage and to his huge sense of loss. So it happened, as Robert Gittings and Jo Manton have observed in *The Second Mrs. Hardy*, that Florence, once Hardy's coveted unavailable love, replaced Emma, the all-too-available wife; while poor dead Emma, with Hardy married to Florence, now became the unavailable love object.

Somewhat less than perfect though Florence must have found this situation, it appears that she went along with it without much fuss. When Hardy himself died in 1928, she had more to contend with than the ghost of her husband's first wife. There were conflicts galore, beginning no later than the funeral. Hardy's friend Sydney Cockerell, whom Hardy had named with Florence as joint trustee of his estate, had arranged for a ceremonious burial at Westminster Abbey, just as Maugham had written in *Cakes and Ale*. Yet Hardy had requested that he be buried with his family in Stinsford churchyard near the house where he was

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born. To Florence's acute dismay, a rather gruesome compromise was reached. Hardy's remains were duly cremated and interred in Poets' Corner at Westminster Abbey, but not before his heart was removed from his body and transferred to Stinsford, where it was buried during a second funeral service.

Feeling, understandably, that she had been pushed by Cockerell and his co-conspirator, the playwright James Barrie, into making these unsavory, if not to say grisly, burial arrangements, Florence hastened to establish her dominion over Hardy's literary remains. She had herself once wanted to be a writer and had patiently typed and retyped the manuscript of Hardy's autobiography while he was alive; she was not easily going to give up her right to control the publication of her husband's works now that he was dead. That same year, 1928, she rushed into publication a first volume of the autobiography, changing Hardy's first-person narrative into the third person and claiming that the book was actually her own biography of her husband. But the narrative was largely Hardy's, as he had meant it to be, for he had intended this book to stand as the authoritative record of his life.

Florence's claim to authorship was not entirely a fiction, however, for she deleted nearly all of her husband's affectionate references to his first wife, Emma, and made some lengthy additions of her own—additions that, as Michael Millgate has said, "either had been or would have been rejected by [Hardy]." From the text—and from that of the second volume, published in 1930—were excised Hardy's anecdotes about Emma's lunch parties and her help with Hardy's writing, as well as his wishfully fabricated stories about Emma's friendship with Florence in the years before Emma's death. With equal thoroughness, Florence burned every trace of Emma's former presence at Max Gate, destroying two locked boudoirs full of her clothes, her papers—even, allegedly, her old corsets.

So much for Emma. Now Florence tried to rid herself of her co-trustee Cockerell, whose ideas for erecting grand public statues of his friend deeply offended her sensibilities. The two executors quarreled bitterly, Cockerell calling Florence "an inferior woman with a suburban mind" (shades of Amy Driffield), and Florence trying unsuccessfully to give up her trusteeship. Each began to act behind the other's back. In 1929 Florence privately printed a forgotten story of her husband's without consulting Cockerell, while in 1932 he took part in reconsecrating a church as a memorial to Hardy, an occasion to which Florence was not invited.

Meanwhile, the reviews that began to appear of the two-volume "biography" were admiring, praising the author's wife for her discretion. Florence set herself up at Max Gate as the overseer of Hardy's one true

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memorial, the "museum" that Maugham described with such malicious accuracy. But this was not the end of Florence Hardy's story, as it was Amy Driffield's.

Without knowing it, Florence had been married to a man of substantial wealth. When Hardy died his estate was valued at more than £90,000, and his royalties and copyrights were worth a fortune. Accustomed to running her household on a shoestring, Florence now found herself in a position to act on some of her ambitions: to own a car, to travel, and to have a flat of her own in London. She chose a flat in the same house in which Hardy had once worked, a block from the residence of Sir James Barrie. When her long-established acquaintance with this friend and admirer of her husband's was rekindled in the city, Florence poignantly mistook Barrie's neighborly affection for a declaration of love. He was, after all, in his early seventies—the age Hardy had been when they married—and he seemed to need looking after, for the strange, child-like author of *Peter Pan* was frequently in poor health. Florence had been Hardy's nurse for years before he died; it was natural for her to want to assume the same duties for Barrie.

There was no way Florence was ever going to become Lady Barrie, no matter how many fond hopes she may have cherished. For Barrie had, not to put too fine a point on it, a thing for the wives and widows of famous men: he liked to flatter them, even to give them large gifts of money—but he never intended or allowed his excessive attentions to flower into intimacy. When this became painfully clear to Florence, she packed up her things and went back to Max Gate. She was forced to conclude that, in the eyes of London literary society in general and in the mind of Sir James in particular, she was nothing but an official representative of her great dead husband, and someone regarded as wholly uninteresting in her own right.

Florence spent the last years of her life entertaining American academic pilgrims at Max Gate, supporting a local hospital, and serving (as Hardy once had) as a Borough Magistrate in Dorchester, where she worked to improve child welfare and low-cost housing. When she died in 1937 at the age of fifty-eight, her ashes were buried next to Hardy's grave in Stinsford churchyard.

As Hardy's widow, Florence managed to accomplish little in the shaping of his reputation or the publication of his works. That he remains one of the brightest lights of English literature is true largely because the works, poetry and novels, that were so famous in his lifetime continue to speak to readers sixty years after his death. In most biographies of Hardy, Florence is mentioned as only a peripheral figure. Except as the "author" of his biography, she rarely appears in indexes of scholarly studies. Of course she survives, rather vaguely, through her portrait in

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Cakes and Ale, in which Maugham gleefully recorded her unimaginative tastes, her grim decorum, her curatorial zeal. Whether she behaved the way she did because of the demands of her milieu—despite the rather daring circumstances in which she and Hardy were married, she otherwise operated within the complacent conventions of Edwardian middle-class English life—or whether she was incapable of being anything other than the stubbornly loyal, protective, undemanding soul she was, one cannot say. (Patience, Hardy had written in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles,* is "that blending of moral courage with physical timidity.") But if ever a widow has been penalized for behaving exactly as convention dictated, that widow was Florence Dugdale Hardy. Being Hardy's widow was at best a mixed blessing, at worst a thankless task. Hardy could have been speaking for his wife when he wrote, in his bitter poem titled "Hap," of the "purblind Doomsters," Casualty and Time, who can just as arbitrarily sprinkle "Blisses about my pilgrimage as pain."

While *Cakes and Ale* has been considered an eminently capable, if cruel, representation of Florence Hardy, it would take a novelist far more powerful than Maugham to capture the drama of Countess Tolstoy's predicament after her husband had died. In its largeness not even Cecil B. deMille could have captured it. For the Tolstoys did everything on a scale as spectacular as the history of their huge crumbling country—and dying was no exception.

It is hard to imagine today, when it is so easy to be famous merely for being well known, the exact nature and scope of the Tolstoys' fame at the time of Leo Tolstoy's death at Astapovo in 1910. Around that bleak, wintry train station were gathered swarms of photographers, journalists, chief disciples of the Tolstoyan philosophy, and members of the great man's family (who had chartered a special train to take them there). Conspicuously present was that symbol of modern celebrity, the steadily whirring Pathé movie camera. In the middle of all this public display, a domestic drama was reaching its end. Sonya Tolstoy was not allowed to see her husband until he was nearly dead, for it was thought that the sight of her would hasten his death.

The chief reason the eighty-two-year-old Tolstoy had taken flight from his estate at Yasnaya Polyana was that he could no longer endure the increasingly titanic battles with his wife of forty-eight years. She had borne him thirteen children, patiently copied his manuscripts as he wrote them (she copied *War and Peace* seven separate times, and he followed her advice to publish the novel himself, in six volumes), worked side by side with him in the fields during a country-wide famine, managed his estate and farmlands (no small task, especially after Tolstoy decided to renounce all his interest in property), and faithfully if

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uncomprehendingly stood by him as he underwent the lengthy philosophical conversion that fostered a worldwide cult. By the time the aged, ailing Tolstoy made his escape, Sonya reminded him of every materialistic tie to the world from which he wished to remove himself; he was furious that she would not subscribe to some of his most cherished beliefs, would not become a vegetarian, or resolve, as he did, to live the simple life of a peasant. Meanwhile, Sonya, not without cause, was looking for some financial recompense for her long-term endurance. She fought, and lost, an epic battle over the copyrights to Tolstoy's works, over the rights to publish his diaries, and over his will, of which many drafts were made and which put his literary estate in the hands of his chief disciple, the relentless and secretive Vladimir Chertkov, and Tolstoy's daughter Sasha, who was Chertkov's main collaborationist.

Sonya was not about to let all of this happen without some fireworks: she screamed, she spied, she cajoled, she threatened, she even made at least one suicide attempt. Tolstoy simply wanted to be left in peace. One of his most famous Tolstoyan principles was the renunciation of all property, and he could not understand why his copyrights and diaries should belong to anyone at all. But he was not as detached from the battle as he pretended. His wife was the one person who could torture him, as he was torturing her. Finally, after many agitated years, when both husband and wife were half-mad with anger, he made his desperate, ill-fated escape to Astapovo.

At last, a few hours before Tolstoy died, it was decided that Sonya should be permitted to see him. For a description of the scene that reads like a passage from a novel by Tolstoy himself, it would be difficult to match that of Henri Troyat, from his well-known biography:

> She stopped short, swaying, in the doorway of the room, not daring to go near her husband in front of all these people who hated her. From the doorway she looked at the skeletal little old man with the cavernous cheeks and white beard, who was all the love of her life. At last she made up her mind and walked straight up to the bed, kissed her Lyovochka on the forehead, kneeled and said, "Forgive me, forgive me." But he did not hear.

The funeral train that carried the body of Tolstoy back to Yasnaya Polyana for burial required two cars: one for Tolstoy, and one for all the journalists, photographers, and newsreel cameramen who were recording the event. Four thousand people met the train at the Tolstoy estate. The open coffin was put on a table in the house so that mourners could file through to pay their respects. Meanwhile, there were demonstrations throughout Russia; the incendiary spirit already in the air was fueled by memorials for the writer who had believed so passionately in revolution.

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As A. N. Wilson points out in his recent biography, *Tolstoy*, seven years after Tolstoy's death, when Lenin's Revolution broke out, such was the association in the world's mind of Tolstoy with revolution that the Western press erroneously described the events of 1917 as a Tolstoyan Revolution. This was fame on a nearly unprecedented scale.

If there was no shortage of public grief, where did this leave the privately grieving countess? Suffering from a bad conscience, for one thing. There are many who believe Sonya Tolstoy was seriously mentally ill by this point; whether or not this is true, it is nonetheless clear that her remorse and her guilt were real: she believed that she was responsible for her husband's death. A month after the funeral she wrote in her diary: "Have put away husband's things to protect them from moths. . . . It is a torture to go on living." She told her daughter Tatyana that she thought incessantly about Tolstoy and added, "I treated him badly, and it's a torment to me. . . ." Surprisingly, Sonya now went so far as to become a vegetarian, as her husband had wished. By all accounts she behaved in a mild, kind, distracted way to everyone at the estate, as if her former obstinacy had been crushed by grief.

"But," as Tatyana Tolstoy, the writer's daughter, has written,

> she retained one weakness: she was still afraid of what people would say and write about her when she was gone, she feared for her reputation. As a result she never let slip the slightest opportunity of justifying her words and actions. There was no weapon she would not use in her campaign of self-defense: she was warding off in advance the attacks she knew one day would be made upon her. And she knew by whom.

"Whom" meant Chertkov and his band of Tolstoyans, Sonya's sworn enemies. He, along with Sasha Tolstoy, was now in control of Tolstoy's literary rights and published works. Sonya still retained legal possession of Yasnaya Polyana, but Tolstoy had wished Sasha to buy it from her mother and then turn it over to the peasants. In 1913 Sasha bought the estate for four hundred thousand rubles, giving two-thirds of it to the peasants. Sonya kept 540 of the original 1,800 acres. The year before, her house in Moscow was sold to the government with the request that it be made into a Tolstoy museum and library. The publishing company Sonya had established was no longer allowed to produce Tolstoy's works. To make matters worse, Tolstoy's other children blamed their mother for allowing Tolstoy to leave everything to Sasha.

Most likely Tolstoy had not really intended to torture his wife by excluding her from his will, but only wished her to convert to the Tolstoyan faith and renounce her desire to own property. Yet the practical-minded Sonya regarded this, understandably, as monstrous:

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that her husband expected her not only to raise his children, handle his huge estate and social world, but also to be a perfect Tolstoyan in word and deed is truly amazing. All the same, she felt guilty for her failure, and it seems that everybody around her blamed her for her husband's desperate end.

The Countess stopped writing in her diary shortly after Tolstoy died, claiming that "what was of importance was the past and anything concerning the memory of Tolstoy." She insisted that the money from the estate sale to Sasha be divided among her family, and she lived for a few years on a pension bestowed by the tsar. Continuing to preside quietly over the main house at Yasnaya Polyana, she kept everything as it had been while Tolstoy was alive. Outside, the peasants, running amok with their new wealth, began to chop down the large forest around the estate, while the impervious Sonya saw that everything was in order at the house. Her relative calm, after so many years of Sturm und Drang, appeared to her children to be a sign of dementia. It seemed no one was ever again going to remember her as anything other than a madwoman—whether a raving or a subdued one.

When World War I began, Sonya ignored the brief wave of patriotism that swept the country as Russia entered the war. She lived almost completely in her memories. She had nearly lost her eyesight by the time the Bolsheviks took power, and, helpless, she feared an ambush. But the peasants stood guard and protected her through that long summer of 1917. During the widespread famine of 1918, dinner (or what there was of it) was still served at Yasnaya Polyana by Sonya's white-gloved valet; at the end of the year, however, the government took over the estate to transform it into a farming collective. Ironically, when strangers moved into the house to organize the collective, Sonya's treacherous daughter Sasha returned to become the collective's chairman. Sonya was now in the humiliating position of having to ask for everything she needed from the daughter who had already agreed to divest her of her proper inheritance.

Sonya did not—surely she could not—live through these precarious times for much longer. She died of pneumonia (as Tolstoy had) in 1919, at the age of seventy-five, having lived through four tsars, two famines, several wars, and revolution. Food was scarce around the time of her funeral, so her many fine old clothes were immediately sold to buy flour for the farming collective.

Eight years after Tolstoy had died, Sonya was said to have remarked: "I lived with Lev Nikolayevich for forty-eight years, but I never really learned what kind of man he was." This is an astonishing statement, but it is not hard to believe if one knows anything at all about Tolstoy's conflict-ridden, quixotic, messianic nature. Yet there can be little doubt

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that she loved him greatly—loved him even through her hatred of him, through all her doubts about his philosophizing, and through his ghastly treatment of her.

It took an extremely competent, highly intelligent, hugely energetic woman to meet the demands of marriage to Count Leo Tolstoy, and Sonya Tolstoy was all of these things. Where Florence Hardy rose from undistinguished origins and tried hard to fit into the role of Mrs. Hardy, Sonya, educated and aristocratic, knew from the beginning how to be Countess Tolstoy. She was an endlessly capable, utterly manipulative woman—much more complicated than the simple Florence; and her effusive sufferings, with all imperial Russia crashing down in the background, seem much more grandiose. Yet there were aspects of being Countess Tolstoy that she would not have given up for the world. As much as she feared her reputation being slandered after she was dead, she loved the glamour of knowing she had been the wife of a genius, of being unprecedentedly famous. She was cut out to play her role, and she played it with great flair.

In a sense Sonya Tolstoy was widowed twice, for the ingenious writer with whom she had fallen in love had died, figuratively, around 1882, when Tolstoy abandoned the art of fiction for more lofty philosophical and religious pursuits. The first Tolstoy, the artist, had been far more tolerant than the second; and the demands he made of his wife—copying his manuscripts and advising him about their publication—she had been only too happy to meet, for she understood and revered his genius as a novelist. She was proud of her indispensability to Tolstoy at that time, when there were not yet any disciples snooping around, stealing her Lyovochka's love and attention: there had been only Tolstoy, his work, his wife, and their growing family. After 1882 there would be no more marvelous novels, only rambling philosophical tracts that were all but incomprehensible to Sonya; there would be the inscrutable Chertkov taking over the role of chief helpmate to the the Master; and there would be the endless terrible battles between husband and wife, who each longed for the predicament to end, but who could not until the end tear away from each other. ("She will remain a millstone around my neck and round the children's till I die," Tolstoy wrote in his diary in 1884.)

If Sonya's power over her husband's literary life expired when Tolstoy renounced literature and resolved to become a saint, her power over him in the second phase of his career, though threatened, was alive in a complex way, and shaped by their long years together; it was a power that existed beyond mere copyrights and wills, which bound them together through the mutual torture session that became, ultimately, their marriage.

Tolstoy had written in *War and Peace*, "Pure and complete sorrow is

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as impossible as pure and complete joy." The Tolstoy marriage was a mixture of luxurious, even epic, portions of sorrow and joy. When Tolstoy died, both the exhilaration of battle and the torment of love were dead to Sonya Tolstoy.

One aspect that all literary widows seem to share is an element, to a greater or lesser degree, of theatricality or role-playing, as though in rising to meet the occasion of widowhood they found it necessary to enhance their personality. While Sonya Tolstoy's role as countess amounted to a star turn, in nearly every other widow of a famous writer one can detect similar dramatic instincts. In 1973, the year after Edmund Wilson died, according to his daughter Rosalind, Wilson's widow Elena was described by friends as dashing about, being "very much Madame l'Executrix and having a happy social time."

Nora Joyce, the forthright Galway woman who had left Ireland at the age of twenty without looking back to live in exile with James Joyce, rather enjoyed playing the part of Joyce's widow in the years after his death in 1941. She had always been fond of publicity, though she was never quite sure what all the fuss over Joyce was about; yet, as her biographer Brenda Maddox writes, "As she came to play the part of the Widow Joyce, Nora began at last to believe in her husband's genius." If she wasn't exactly merry, Nora was pleased to give her opinions to all the Joyce worshippers who came to her eager for revelations. To a bibliographer, she spoke in the voice that had long proved to be a crowd-pleaser, the endearingly unsentimental voice of Molly Bloom: "It is just as well my husband didn't have a literary wife. There had to be somebody to do the cooking and wash the dishes." To Ignazio Silone's wife, who asked Nora's opinion of André Gide, she replied: "Sure, when you've been married to the greatest writer in the world you don't remember all the little fellows." And Richard Ellmann reports what is perhaps Nora's last word on the predicament of the author's widow: "They tell me my husband was one of the immortals. I'd much rather be receiving some royalties from his books than be the widow of an immortal."

One literary widow comes to mind whose role-playing was not a theatrical pose, but a matter of survival; to whom profits from royalties and copyrights were for decades completely irrelevant, since anyone could be arrested merely for distributing, and certainly for publishing, her husband's work. As late as 1988 in Russia there was not yet available a proper edition of her husband's works. Nadezhda Mandelstam, widow of the Russian poet Osip Mandelstam, took it upon herself to keep his name alive, to become a human library of his work, through a lifetime of

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indescribable repression and abuse. It would not be extravagant to claim that she is the most heroic literary widow in modern history.

Anybody who has read Mrs. Mandelstam's two-volume memoir, *Hope Against Hope* and *Hope Abandoned*, knows the history of her ordeal in its excruciating detail. Osip Mandelstam, who along with Pasternak is regarded as the greatest twentieth-century Russian poet, could not bear to watch the stunning repression of artistic and personal freedom that terrorized the country after Stalin took control of the Soviet Union at the end of the 1920s. Through his poetry Mandelstam openly challenged the regime by asking, if certainly not for death, then plainly for exile: in the poem denouncing Stalin that led to his arrest, he wrote, "Rather stuff me like a cap in the sleeve / Of the Siberian steppes' warm furcoat." He was arrested on May 1, 1938. He died at the end of the year in a transit camp near Vladivostok. The exact date and circumstances of his death are still uncertain.

After hints of her husband's death reached Nadezhda Mandelstam, she lived as a fugitive, always one step ahead of arrest. During World War II she managed to get to Tashkent, where she somehow earned a university degree and was certified as an English teacher. Her chief reason for continuing to live was her determination to preserve the memory of Mandelstam and his poetry; in fact, for her, *poetry* and *Mandelstam* came to mean the same thing, and when he was condemned to death, so, in her view, was the fate of poetry condemned. Many of his poems she did not venture even to write down for fear of further persecution. Instead she learned them by heart. Mandelstam himself had made her memorize his autobiographical "Fourth Prose" as he dictated it to her, no doubt with a premonition of his own fate.

In the 1960s and early 1970s, Mrs. Mandelstam's two-volume memoir circulated in Russia in samizdat (the underground method of distributing unpublished work in typescript) and was published abroad in translation. She gave away all the royalties she received to her friends, proud that after decades of homelessness, fear, and poverty she was finally in a position to offer assistance to others. At this time she was at last permitted to live in Moscow, where she received countless literary pilgrims, both Russian and foreign, and had the luxury, at last, of openly playing the role of the great poet's widow. Often in the tiny kitchen of her apartment there was a crowd of people waiting to see her, standing patiently as if in line for bread in a bakery.

During the thirty years between the time Osip Mandelstam died and the time of Mrs. Mandelstam's bitterly triumphant return to Moscow, she witnessed events that one would think were beyond the powers of language to relate. Even so, perhaps the most shocking aspect of her memoirs is her insistence that her story is totally unremarkable. "If [the

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police] did not find me," she writes in *Hope Abandoned*, "it was because I was like a needle in a haystack, an infinitely small particle—one of tens of millions of wives of men sent to the camps or killed in the prisons." Some women, she claims, had even less than the scant information she was able to obtain about the details of their husbands' deaths. The camp Solzhenitsyn described in *Ivan Denisovich* was a resort compared with the camps others described to her. Thinking about Mandelstam existing in such a camp was an agony to her. Something like relief came to her when she knew his sufferings were over. "When I heard that M. had died," she wrote, "I stopped having my nightmares about him."

"Thank God that people are mortal," Nadezhda Mandelstam wrote in *Hope Against Hope*. "The only reason one could have to go on living was to remember it all and later tell the story." And, in *Hope Abandoned*, she goes on, "The reader is the final arbiter, and it is for him that I kept Mandelstam's poetry and it is to him that I have handed it over. . . . If the verse I have preserved is of some use to people, then my life has not been wasted."

Nadezhda Mandelstam died on December 29, 1980. Far from having wasted her life, she made that life into an almost sacred act of preservation. In many senses she nearly became her husband: she adopted what has often been called his "inner freedom," his defiance and his determination; and, more prosaically (as I am not the first to point out), she adopted his style and language in her books. "I think there is no greater miracle than time and the phenomenon derived from it: memory," she once wrote. "As we know only too well, history is constantly being falsified right in front of our eyes." What greater devotion could a widow display toward her husband than performing this "miracle" of memory—for so many years and at such enormous risk? Where I have been concerned up to this point with the degree to which authors' widows have managed to control their husbands' reputations, here is a case in which a widow, through sheer heroism, *was* her husband's reputation, no less, and is the sole reason we are privileged to know and appreciate the work of Osip Mandelstam today.

Is there a conclusion to be drawn, a common thread to be tied around the stories of these very different women, with their vastly different histories, who seem to share only the fact that they each lived with a husband who was also a literary genius? They all wanted sovereignty over their husbands' work, though only one—Nadezhda Mandelstam—obtained it, at a risk that might easily have cost her her life. Other than that fact, the only thing these widows have in common is the malignant way in which their predicament seems habitually to be satirized in the public imagination. Florence Hardy's "suburban mind," Sonya Tolstoy's

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opera buffa door-slamming at Yasnaya Polyana, even (as some have characterized her at the end of her life) Nadezhda Mandelstam's self-parody of a terminally irascible old crone—despite all their efforts, these are the ways authors' widows are most often destined, it appears, to be portrayed.

Yet, as I started to read more about the lives of these women, my initial amused condescension softened into sympathy. For who would not, after selfless years of coddling and caring for a difficult man, long for a bit of power over his estate, for a bit of public recognition of her own? Who would not resent being judged as inconsequential as soon as the primary reason for her celebrity had been taken away from her? And who could not resist the pleasure of serving as high priestess to worshippers wishing to pay their respects? These caretakers of the house of literature, while they created no art of their own, in many thankless ways encouraged its production, and protected it as they thought best. Whether their compensations were worth the price is a question I, or perhaps anyone else, can't presume to answer.

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A Gathering of Family

A Memoir

WILLIAM HOLTZ

IT IS THE END OF THE DAY and the end of the summer. We sit, a family gathered, on the screened-in porch, looking out over the lake. An afternoon storm has just passed, and as the evening sky clears in the west the sinking sun catches the clouds still lowering overhead and suddenly the air about us is bright with gold, a fair shimmering that glows on the lake and the yellowing birches and even touches our faces with a radiance not our own. We are stricken with the sudden glory; our voices rise and fall in quiet flutterings of delight, like dozing birds roused in our evening tree. Wonder exhausts our words, and we fall into silence. A moment to remember, I tell myself, as long as I live.

Tomorrow some of the family will leave, and in a few days my wife and I will close the cabin for the winter. But for now, my infant grandson sits on my lap, looking into my face with the perfect and undiscriminating curiosity that is the privilege of an innocence so lately rocked in fetal waters. His face glows in the golden light. I, no innocent, return his regard with an interest less pure, as I seek in his placid features some resemblance to my own. I am his mother's father, but in him I see mainly signs of his father's family—my daughter's eyes, perhaps, which, while not my own, seem reminiscent of others in my family. It is an old delusion that passes quickly. What comfort for my decline in some blurred impress of myself on my posterity? Indeed, through the intervening embraces of passion, the liquid exchanges of love, what dilution of my DNA could still work its way in his veins, write my message in his tender flesh? What he finds in my face I cannot guess. The sun settles lower, and I am in shadow.

We have been looking at a book together while the family murmurs in conversation around us. My grandson's silken hair and soft cheek have been nestled against my chest as I point to the bright pictures and prompt his talk: *Ooh . . . and what is this big animal*? He looks, and jabs

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the elephant with a moist finger, and attacks the problem of speech with sounds that will soon be shaped to a language I know. But restless now, he turns his gaze from the book to my face; then, with motives I cannot fathom, he slips off my lap and with spraddled legs and sagging diaper lurches away through the golden light. With a sudden catch at my heart, I find myself brimming with love and vague premonition.

Old bones not my own stir softly inside me. How, I wonder, might my mother's father have asked these questions, and his lineage before him? I have thought sometimes of those movie scenes in which the scion of some great family paces the portrait gallery of his ancestors, where generation upon generation recedes from the brightly lighted present toward some remote but precise origin. But to retrace my line is to halt at the edge of this century, the ocean, and an unknown tongue. Across the gulf of history, geography, and language my people cannot speak to me; and in my mind's eye is no receding gallery but only the brief reaches of childhood memory. In the foreground stands my mother, whose voice I know; in the middle distance my grandfather, whose voice I hear but cannot understand; and at his back only a dark and vacant tunnel of time.

II

For years I have intermittently tried to reconstruct my grandfather's image from fragments of memory and casual bits of testimony in family lore. Only twice, do I remember, did he ever even notice me—I was eight that summer—although there must have been other times, earlier, that I cannot recall. But one day that summer I drew near him as he sat in the glassed-in front porch of the little frame house, reading, as he often did, from the big Finnish Bible. I had learned to read and was proud of my skill, but a glance at the page defeated me, as had the alien speech that my mother revived in herself each time we visited. Looking up, he gripped my shoulder with a sudden hand and drew me to him. I remember the furrowed face, dark and suddenly close, the faintly leathery smell of him—it was probably the great leather-bound Bible—and the faded blue eyes looking into mine. Then, with one hand on the page and the other on my shoulder, he began to read to me, a harsh voice rolling over the strange syllables as his finger moved down the page. Uncomfortable, I endured a few moments before I pulled away.

This was in Hancock, Michigan, in 1940. We were there, my mother and I, for most of that summer. Usually, we came for summer visits of a week or so—my father's vacation—from our home in southern Michigan, near the Indiana border, to the little Upper Peninsula copper-mining town that hangs to the hillside above Portage Lake and the ship canal,

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facing its sister city of Houghton across the water. But this summer we stayed on while my father went home; it was well past the Fourth of July, I know, because I remember hearing from my bed the celebratory dynamite blasts beyond the edge of town: a blasting tradition that remained, even though the mines were closed. There had been other visits, too, at least one in the winter, my mother and I, when I was three and my father was out of work, but I have only shards of memory of those times—chiefly of a Christmas tree with actual candles and of a long, swooping nighttime sled ride with my mother down the Quincy Hill, past my grandparents' home, and around the corner into Summit Street where my aunt lived.

My mother was young then, not yet thirty, and she pulled me on the sled up the long Quincy Hill to the top where the old mine buildings still loomed near the road. The cold must have been intense; I can recall it only as a kind of pressure around me, and the long glide down the hill toward the streetlights below was a course through cold tangible in the glittering and shadowy air. My mother tried to get me to walk the few blocks back to my grandparents' house, but I kept sitting down in the snow. Finally she pulled me on the sled. Then at last I was undressed, drowsing in front of the warm kitchen range, and laid in bed with a hot brick at my feet.

Perhaps the dream came that night. Certainly it came from some time well before my age of continuous memory—a vivid and curious dream, a dream that returned, it seems, often, and that registered itself powerfully not so much in my mind as on my body. I was deep in a cave, far beneath my grandfather's house, and was trying to escape through a tiny opening, a tight tunnel that I tried to wriggle through: I could feel the pressure around my neck and shoulders as I strained to force my way out. Years later, in college, I identified this as a birth dream, some urgent reconstruction of primal experience in the only terms my imagination could then present to me. By the time I understood it, it had been neutralized, an academic item only, and it did not recur: I sometimes cited it for my students as an instance of unconscious memory. But I can remember, when it did come, waking frightened, lying awake and wondering: what happened next? It seemed that I ought somehow to emerge in my grandfather's basement where the family was gathered in the summer kitchen and sit down at the table among them. "Well, here I am," I would say.

III

My grandfather was a dark Finn, short and spare, and in his later years little more than a scrap of twisted leather topped with a shock of

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iron-gray hair. His stock was unmixed with the fair and tall Scandinavian type of the other northern countries. Evidence from language tells us that the Finns are Scandinavian only by accident of geography, migration, and recent history: their ancestral home was central Russia—their ancient cousins, by another migration, became the Magyars of modern Hungary—and dark skin and hair and short stature mark these origins in many Finns. Within the culture, *Suomi* is the traditional name for the language and the nation; Tacitus, the first outsider to record notice of them, wrote of a wild and primitive people called *Fenni,* and Finland has been a name imposed on the maps at least since a period of Swedish domination. A later emigration brought many Finns to this country at the turn of the century—many to escape Russian domination, Finland then being a Russian province, and many to find work in the mines and forests of Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. Even here they were ethnically distinct, and at the bottom of the immigrant hierarchy; in some lumber camps the Finns were forced to eat at their own tables, the blacks of Scandinavian America, and jokes of their uncleanliness are still current. (How did the Finns come to America? Took a bath and floated across on the scum.) Doubtless the canard originated in their darker coloring and their determination to stay clean—that is, in their ritual devotion to the sauna, which has become their contribution to American yuppie indulgence.

No indulgence for the Finns; rather, a sauna was such a necessity that it was often the first building erected on the tiny farms they cleared. In the towns, neighborhood saunas were quickly established, and makeshift home saunas were cobbled into many basements and garages. The sauna bath was a family occasion, like Sunday dinner, and often a social occasion among friends. My uncle had a summer home on the ship canal, that extension of Portage Lake that permits Great Lakes shipping a shortcut through the Keweenaw Peninsula. There was a sauna at the water's edge, and on weekend visits it was my grandfather's privilege to start the fire early in the afternoon and to tend it in the stove improvised from a small metal barrel with rocks on the top. It was his privilege, too, to make the bathing switches, not of the traditional birch twigs but of the fragrant tips of white cedar, which grew along that shore. I would see the plume of blue from the chimney, smell the wood smoke rich on the air, while my grandfather moved among the trees, cutting cedar tips with his pocketknife. And it was his privilege, finally, to be the first to enter and bathe: no one could stand the heat he could endure, alone, on the highest bench near the ceiling. Later would come the younger men, and last the women and children. The heat entranced me. I sucked it deep into my lungs, where it warmed my vitals from the inside out; and I clambered to the highest bench where I sat moist and hot and glassy-

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eyed until my alarmed mother pulled me down and scrubbed me with soap and the fragrant cedar switches. The hardy would end with a plunge in the waters of the canal, which come directly from Lake Superior; others would content themselves with a sloshing rinse with buckets drawn from the end of the dock. At night, in bed and in my pajamas, I could still catch faintly the cedar smell on my skin.

What specifically drew my grandfather from Finland to Michigan's Upper Peninsula I never learned. Probably the life he left was so hard that anything would have seemed better. He was a farmer, but he had served in the Russian army, and my mother can remember him demonstrating the manual of arms with a broom. A brother had preceded him to the new world, and apparently the news was good enough to persuade my grandfather to take the leap, probably about 1898. He left behind his wife and infant daughter, my oldest aunt, who would not be able to join him for several years. His brother went back to Finland, but my grandfather worked for a time in a Detroit factory before making his way to the north, where many Scandinavians had found a climate and a landscape to remind them of home. He had a small farm near the community of Salo for a while, where my mother was born and taken directly to the sauna for her first bath. I have walked those fields near Salo, in the few places between rock and swamp it is possible to scrape in the earth and raise a little hay, feed a cow or two, and coax along a few vegetables in the brief summers. But inevitably my grandfather was drawn into the copper mines in the years before the First World War. By that time he was already middle-aged.

Great veins of copper run through the rocky ridges of the Keweenaw Peninsula, and over one of them was developed the Quincy Mine. The operating capital, of course, came from investors in the East, and there has now been written an official history of the mine, which is long on the accomplishments of the investors and managers but short on the lives of the men who mined the ore. The mine had already a long record of intermittently profitable operations by the time my grandfather settled his family into a small company house just below the mine and began the grueling daily underground labor to see what profit he might wring from the rock. It must have been frighteningly unnatural work to begin so late in his life. As a farmer he had risen in dark and worked through the brightness of day to the night again, but now darkness claimed him the day round. The workday was twelve hours. In the winter, he would see daylight only on Sundays. Few of the Finns were originally miners; only the immigrants from Wales and Cornwall brought their profession with them, along with the Cornish pastie, the half-moon-shaped meat pie that could be heated in morning and remain warm in the lunch pail until midday. The Finns soon adopted these with their new work, and for

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twenty and more years my grandfather left each morning with his hot lunch pail for the climb up the hill to the Quincy Mine, to the daily descent into the pit.

It was brutal work. Only as my own body loses its resilience in middle age have I been able to imagine how brutal it must have been. From time to time the workers struck, of course: my mother's earliest memory is of abandoned lunch pails along Quincy Hill, where the violence of the 1914 strike intercepted those who were trying to go to work before they could reach the mine. Sometimes a man would come home with his arm hanging limp, his shoulder dislocated from swinging a pick or sledge: a capable wife would put her man on the kitchen floor and, with one foot braced each against his neck and armpit, pull and ease the shoulder joint back into place. Shafts would sometimes collapse, and the falling rock would shoot the compressed air out the opening of the mine shaft in a great air blast heard in the homes below. And then the families would wait: my mother can remember lying with her ear to the basement floor, hoping to hear the miners hundreds of feet below. Other dangers came more slowly and insidiously. My grandfather wheezed with what was called miners' bronchitis, probably silicosis, that weakened him for the pneumonia that came in later years to kill him.

IV

How can I reconstruct his later life? The Quincy Mine closed in the Depression, a victim of declining demand and the cheaper production from the open-pit mines of Montana and Arizona. Social Security was legislated in time to give him a small retirement income. In his entire life, he never drove an automobile, used a telephone, sent a telegram, or owned a radio. His Bible and the Finnish-language newspaper were his sole windows on the world. Most of his family and his wife's had remained in Finland, and now he was doubly isolated, for his children had married and left home, flowing into the mainstream of English-speaking life. He and my grandmother never learned English; the Finnish-speaking community was vital enough to hold them enclosed all their lives. I never understood a word either of them ever said to me, except that my grandmother could approximate my name: *"Veeli!"* she would call, *"Veeli boyga!"* I can still recognize the language spoken, its unique rhythms and euphony of vowels, although it is empty of meaning for me.

The talk during those summer visits surged back and forth between the two languages as my mother and my aunts deferred in turn to their parents and to the children and husbands who spoke no Finn. Mostly we gathered for meals in the basement, which became a summer kitchen

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with a door into the backyard. My grandmother was voluble and merry, but my grandfather would sit at one end of the table, usually silent unless spoken to, while the conversation flowed mainly among the women in both languages. He was not so much sunk in the silence of the listener or spectator as he was withdrawn elsewhere. There is, some claim, a distinctive Finnish gaze, in which some Finns simply are not with you for a while, their eyes focused somewhere beyond you on an inner horizon. My grandfather had it, as he drifted back, perhaps, beyond the long curve of the globe and the receding years, to some remote gatherings of family that had rooted themselves in his memory as these did in mine. Returning, he would drink his coffee from his saucer, sometimes sucking it through a cube of sugar held in his teeth. It was the only indulgence I ever saw in his life.

Late in that summer a truckload of slabwood was dumped in the backyard, and in the afternoons he would split firewood to stove-size pieces and carry them into the basement to stack against the wall. My mother told me that by the time of cold weather he would have the basement filled from floor to ceiling with wood for the kitchen cookstove, the only heat the house would have. I sat one afternoon on the back steps watching him. He would balance the thin, wide piece of slabwood on the splitting block and with precise strokes of his ax reduce it to a few pieces of cookstove size, tossing them into a pile at one side. He gave no sign he knew I was there. I got out my pocketknife and began to whittle on one of the odd pieces of wood. It was a new knife, bought with a few dimes extorted from my mother, and had three blades and a celluloid grip in a swirl of blue, brown, and red. I thought it powerfully beautiful. Then I was aware of my grandfather standing over me, his dark hand thrust out. In the palm lay his knife—larger and ancient, it seemed, but with a handle in the same swirl of blue and brown and red. A smile cracked across his face and there was a pattern of lines etched there I had never seen before.

For a moment we looked at each other, I still seated, he leaning on his ax, his other hand extended. Then he reached for a bushel basket nearby, picked up a few kindling chips from the ground around the splitting block, and motioned me to take over. After I had filled the kindling box in the basement, I helped him carry in the split wood for the stove and stack it against the wall. Our work finished, we stepped together from the darkening basement into the chill twilight of the backyard. I felt a hand on my shoulder; his voice cracked and rasped. "*Veeli,*" he said. "*Veeli boyga.*"

I never saw him again. We did not make a visit the next year; then World War II began, travel was restricted, and he died in late winter two years after. My grandmother followed him a few winters later. I remem-

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ber the telegrams, the vacancy of my mother's absence for a week or so, the unintelligibility of a death so remote. Memories of my grandfather drifted to the margins of my consciousness for many years, except for a few provocations. I knew that he and I bore the same middle name. An older cousin once happened to remark that of all the cousins I most resembled him. And I remembered years earlier hearing her father say that my grandfather was, in his way, a very learned man, a lay scholar of the Bible. As the two observations coalesced, I felt a line of heritage begin to emerge, as I could find in him not only my name, my facial structure, my coloring, but my love of the book and of the word, if not his faith in the Book and the Word. And I never knew, until my wife told me, how characteristic were my moments of abstraction, when she would pass her hand between my gaze and my own inner horizon. But as the fullness of time brought me my children's children, I could feel him stalking nearer within me; and as I looked out over my own privileged life, I could look in more and more upon the bafflement, resignation, and consolations that must have been his. Now has age brought me full circle, to find my grandfather in myself as I seek myself in my grandson.

V

So, forty-odd years after, I returned this past summer to find that little frame house on the street rising up to the old mine. For more than a decade I have had a summer cabin in the north, half a day from Hancock; but some unconfronted blockage in my thoughts prevented my return to my grandparents' house. It was, I finally understood, something I had been putting off for a long time. The house itself had been so altered by successive remodelings that at first I did not find it, but instead found the one next door, which was identical except that the floor plan was reversed: in it I met a man older than myself who remembered my uncle. No one was at home at the unrecognizable house next door, so I went on up the hill to the site of the Quincy Mine, which now had become a historical exhibit to attract tourists, one of which I was. There I confronted, at a remove of two generations, something of the reality of that killing life of the hard-rock miner.

A pleasant young man guided our tour group from the gift shop into the hoist room, still housing the great steam hoist—the heart of the old Quincy operation and the glory of the present-day museum. It was a marvel of engineering in its day, and it remains impressive even now in its repose, towering three stories above the floor we stood upon. The guide's voice drifted away into the silence overhead, and I tried to imagine the din of this room years ago. Clanking and hissing as huge pressures of steam fed through its cylinders, the hoist turned a great

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double-coned drum that reeled and unreeled miles of steel cable through a tower-and-pulley system high overhead to the mine shaft itself, a hundred yards away. Here it was that my grandfather had gone underground, with others like himself, in small cars connected to the great hoist by the long and lengthening umbilical cord on which their lives depended. They dropped not straight down, as on an elevator, but down on rails at a steep angle into the hillside, cable cars under controlled descent. Down they would roll in their little cars, leaning back against the slope as the cable lowered them a mile or more back down the hill they had just walked up to work, but now beneath the very houses in which they lived—there to attack the rock face with their drills and hammers and pick-axes, fighting off the dark with their carbide lamps and heaving the ore into cars that were hauled back up the track they had come down. The deeper shafts were baled of seeping water by special cars that scooped huge, dripping loads from the flooded chambers and discharged them at the mine head. At the end of the shift the men were retrieved, a more precious cargo, drawn back up the dripping shafts and delivered to the day, or night, to walk back down the hill to their homes below. Old photographs of the mining crews stare back at me from the museum walls: anonymous faces, sullen and apprehensive, of men young and in their middle age. I could not have recognized my grandfather had he been among them.

The abandoned shafts are inaccessible now, closed for safety, and much of the network of low tunnels and narrow chambers the miners groped through by their flaring lamps now lies dark and silent under tons of settled water. The older miners, like my grandfather, retired—grateful, no doubt, not to have to face the daily entombment that the old job entailed. The younger men drifted into different jobs or left town; and the town itself ceased to grow, declined, found a new stability of a lower order, sustaining itself on tourists, a little lumbering, a growing college across the lake. No one's sons and grandsons would become miners, and no one's daughters would marry into the mines: my aunts and uncle and mother all left in time, finding their way to college and jobs in the southern part of the state. The copper ore is still there, but too deep to be produced at a profit. Thus to the slow fluctuations of economic law do I owe my own good fortune, not to have been a miner's son as well as grandson and not to have gone into the mines myself.

Further on up the peninsula is the older Delaware Mine, now open to the public—its first level only, saved from flooding by an underground stream that drains it. Down wooden steps at a steep angle we descend—a mere sixty feet or so—but the chill, the damp, the dripping rock, the smell of enclosed moisture drive into my bones a sudden realization of what the grave must be. A string of dim lights lets the tourist see more

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clearly than the miners ever did the sloping caverns and narrow tunnels where they worked their days away. From one vantage point we can see the water flooding the levels below: a tossed pebble plunks into the dark water, ripples spread away into blackness. Our guide turns out the lights for a moment and jokingly gets us to see a ghost, some persistence on the retina of the vanished light. Other ghosts stir in me: in the flooded tunnels hundreds of feet below, here and at Quincy and at all the abandoned mines of this ancient and rocky land, ghostly miners toil slowly, like deep-sea divers in depths no one will ever see again, at one with rock and water and darkness. I begin to feel an old tightness in my neck and shoulders, a bursting of my lungs, as I strain upward and outward through dark, water-filled tunnels toward some light at the back of my mind. Our guide turns on the light, and in a self-conscious shuffle our group begins the climb back to the surface, our claustrophobia palpable among us. We have been underground for twenty minutes. The chill is still deep in my body, and I think I understand what my grandfather sought to drive out with the fiercest heat of the sauna.

Later my wife and I found our way to the small cemetery on the hillside above the lake where my grandfather lay buried, my grandmother beside him. It was a hot day for Hancock; we sweat in our summer clothes. Part of the cemetery, the newer part, was neat and well tended—it had been endowed for perpetual care, the grounds keeper explained. The older section was overgrown and unkempt: formerly, families had tended the plots, but two generations had grown up and left the town, and there was no one to remember their dead. The grounds keeper consulted a rusty box of file cards and led us to the plot in his pickup truck; from the truck bed he pulled out a power mower and cut away the weeds and brambles over a small granite marker set flush with the earth. Names and year of death only. My oldest aunt had laid the marker, I assumed, the summer after my grandmother's death. To dig the winter ground is deadly hard work; and even today, winter dead are stored for spring burial and brought to the cemetery, tiers of coffins on a flatbed truck, to be lowered into an earth now soft enough to receive them. My mother had never been able to visit the grave, so for her sake we took a picture. My wife borrowed a yellow rose from a nearby memorial basket and laid it across the stone.

Standing at his feet, feeling the tug of mortality at my bones, I thought of my grandfather lying still and patient in a chamber now too narrow to swing a pick in, waiting in sure and certain hope of the resurrection. The old dream flickered again behind my eyes, and for a moment he surfaces in my arms like a drowned man, I sink like one into his, and I am dreaming of my grandfather dreaming my dream. Deep beneath the earth, in dark, water-filled caves, we struggle upward together in tight

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embrace toward the day. But as quickly as they coalesce the dreams diverge, and something has been exchanged. The dream of birth remains with him, and I am left with another I like less well. I stoop to return the rose to its rightful place. The summer sun is hot on my shoulders, but it does not reach deep enough to soothe a shudder at my heart.

VI

How those early days have marked me I understand only as I age. After my grandmother's death, my mother never returned to her childhood home. Even now she is reluctant to talk of the old times, and I can only guess how hard they must have been for her. In later years I have lived in California, in the Northwest, and in the South—but in time an inner compass asserted itself, and I turned my face again and again to the North. A modest affluence and a profession neither of which my grandfather could have imagined permit me to spend my summers reading and writing in a summer home on a lake, where I have a leisure beyond his conception for the book and the word. But I do not spend my winters in this land, nor do I want to. My daughter brings my grandson to visit on vacation. On my lap he will sit, turning pages of book after book with me; and I know that as he struggles toward words over bright pictures, he will grasp a language that we share. The love of the book and of the word is grounded here. And I wonder what dreams from his childhood will connect him to me. Perhaps he will dream of great gray elephants swaying through birch groves bathed in golden light. I dream now, from time to time, of dark passages, but I doubt that this is a dream of birth.

The sun has passed from the lake, and as we sit in the gathering darkness voices fall silent and the evening chill descends on us. My grandson has clambered back up into my chair and lies sleeping against my chest; I have wrapped my arms about him against the cold, and we rest in a bonded warmth in the darkening night air. I am suddenly aware that my wife stands by my chair, puts her hand on my arm. "Why don't you start a fire?" she says. She takes the child from me with practiced grasp; he starts slightly, then sinks into deeper sleep. I stir myself to lay kindling in the Franklin stove, and soon the family drifts inside as the firelight leaps and glints about the room. I go outside for more wood where it is stacked in the crawl space beneath the porch: the stove is our only source of heat, and cutting and splitting firewood has become a ritual exercise—a recreation just so edged with necessity as to flavor the labor with both pleasure and virtue. No one, as yet, sits on the steps whittling with his pocketknife, waiting to gather chips. I gauge the size of the crawl space in my mind; it has never been filled, but a small

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person can stand upright in it and might get back into places too narrow for me to reach.

My arms loaded with wood, I pause to look out over the darkening lake. For years we have talked of building a sauna. A friend has given me a makeshift stove, welded up from scrap metal, and I have plans for the building on paper. Perhaps I will stake it out next summer. There is plenty of firewood, and birch trees aplenty for the traditional birch switches. But I have my eye on a stand of white cedars just down the road, and as I turn back into the glowing cabin I wonder how much of the ancient heat I will be able to endure as I set the mark for those who will follow me.

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The Time It Takes to See

SAMUEL HAZO

This poem isn't working out.
I want to say that words
  and wonder stay at odds.
                Feel
  what you see when you see it,
  and the sight's within you.
                Speak,
  and it's gone.
                Is it a mystery
  to claim we aren't rehearsed
  for mystery?
                When death or joy
  or love surprises us, we end
  by grieving, talking out of tune
  or looking idiotic.
                Years
  afterward we find the words
  for what we had no words for
  then, which means the past
  is simply what we make (re-make)
  of it, which means we're always
  in arrears.
                We sort our memories
  like players who arrange the cards
  they're dealt into a kind of order.
Failing even there, we say
  that only artists save the minute
  as it fades.
                Compared with all
  the bronze perfections of Rodin,
  we kiss like amateurs, have stances

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that are less than statuesque
and dance with all the dignity
of clowns.
But why compare?
Rodin the sculptor knew
the luxury of second sight
and carved with all the flawlessness
that retrospect allowed.
Rodin
the man was like the rest of us,
knowing the heart can never
be prepared for what awaits it,
knowing we do the best we can
without the option of revision.
Is art mere taxidermy then,
a way of re-inventing yesterday
into the day we wanted it to be?
Or does the time of seeing
happen when we revolutionize past
wonder into something we can say?
One way or the other, seeing's
not believing any more than
listening means only hearing.
Somehow the time at hand
must come again when we're
composed enough to understand.
If what we've lost by then
to living we've regained in gratitude,
we've lost as ably as we can.

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MUSIC

A Sunday Afternoon with Virgil Thomson

SEYMOUR I. TOLL

Virgil Thomson died exactly ten years from the day I met him at his Chelsea Hotel apartment in Manhattan. The precision of one decade was a meaningless coincidence, but it did have a certain nattiness that might have appealed to his taste for order.

Several weeks before our meeting I wrote requesting an opportunity to talk with him on a Saturday or Sunday. I asked if he would chat about himself and other Americans in Paris during the 1920s. He responded promptly in a signed note typed by a secretary on faded blue stationery bearing VIRGIL THOMSON in prominent sans serif letters. He generously offered either Saturday or Sunday on any of the last three weekends in September. The date turned out to be Sunday afternoon, September 30, 1979.

I had recently written a piece about Thomson's Paris experience during the 1920s and sent it to him. I hoped he would read it before our meeting so that I could learn if I had his Paris story straight. They were years he described in *Virgil Thomson*. In a vast literature, his autobiography is one of the most evocative and finely written personal accounts of the period, filled with the kind of writing Leonard Bernstein recalled on Thomson's death. "We all loved his music and rarely performed it. Most of us preferred his unpredictable, provocative prose." Students of the era rarely recognize, let alone celebrate, it as elegant cultural history.

After I buzzed my way up to his apartment and stepped off the elevator at the ninth floor that Sunday afternoon, Thomson was waiting there. His greeting was as spare as the typeface he chose for his stationery. His speech was rapid and assertive, his movements remarkably quick for a man then nearly eighty-three. Without pause, he led me through the entrance into the quarters of a bachelor who had surrounded himself with the furnishings of a breed of intellectual Thomson once called "upper-bracket professional." Muted browns and beiges gave the appearance of a vaguely European salon from some earlier time in this century. The upholstered chairs were inviting, the abundant paintings and sculpture unobtrusive, and a grand piano tied things together nicely.

He was small and built for suits once sized portly. A checked sports jacket, slacks, well-worn loafers, and open shirt announced a man who should have been thoroughly at ease with himself, and yet he was tightly wound. He wore glasses shaped like TV screens and set in smoky plastic frames; he had a hearing aid, a formidable bald head, inquisitive yet skeptical eyes, and a face that oddly was both hangdog and animated. Moments after our meeting, the pitch of his almost squeaky voice began to descend. There was not a word of preliminary small talk.

He set aside the roses I had brought with the curt assurance, "I'll put them in water later," and led me from the living room into an adjacent study filled with hundreds of books and vertical cardboard box files of music and music manuscript—probably decades of accretions, all of it aligned perfectly with no blemish of that bookish disarray one would expect in the study of an elderly intellectual who had spent much of his working life there.

Born in Kansas City into a warm, hospitable Missouri family Mark Twain would have en-

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joyed, Thomson "lived in Paris because it reminded [him] of Kansas City." He was there from the mid-1920s until 1940 when the German occupation forced his return to the United States, and he settled in New York. His stint until 1954 as music critic of the *New York Herald Tribune* was a calling in which "musical polemics were my intent, not aiding careers or teaching Appreciation." He fairly described his critical prose as "sassy but classy," and he conducted and composed music for the concert hall, ballet, and films such as Pare Lorentz's documentaries "The Plow That Broke the Plain" and "The River." After leaving the *Tribune*, he wrote for the *New York Review of Books*.

Rather than offer me a chair at a table covered with a red-checked cloth, he sat me down as if annoyed and impatient to get on with our business. Laid before his place were my manuscript, two small memo pad sheets covered with double columns of handwritten page numbers, and a metal cup tightly packed with soft-lead Blackwing pencils of identical length and ground to uniform needle sharpness.

He wanted to know about my interest in Americans in Paris, then listened closely as I told him that the city was little more than a place name to me when, as a nineteen-year-old G.I., I first went there in late December 1944. In well over forty years, the memory of that journey still conjures Goya-like images of modern war on rails, a plangent American army hospital train jammed with wounded troops. Like me, they were in the way when the Germans had their terminal convulsion of aggression on December 16, the day the Battle of the Bulge began along the Ardennes front where my infantry division had dug in. My first view of Paris was like a silent Dada film of the twenties. Traveling from the railhead to a hospital in the city, I saw only leaden sky and one long rooftop jiggling across a pair of rear-door windows of an army ambulance. During several weeks of confinement, that was all I was to see of the great city.

Returning to college after the war, I heard murmurings about the twenties in Paris and the lost generation. They resolved into what seemed to be a single clear voice of authority when sometime in the fifties I first read *Exile's Return* by Malcolm Cowley.

I told Thomson that Cowley's book got me interested in Americans in Paris and the idea of a lost generation. That initial reading left me with the badly warped impression that young Americans in the arts who lived in Paris widely shared what Cowley described as the lost generation's detached and aimless view of existence and its contempt for philistinism rampant during the American twenties. Actually, Cowley made no grand statistical generalizations. He dealt only with a few writers, although several expatriates—for example, Hemingway, Harry and Caresse Crosby—lived so differently or wrote so engagingly about Paris that I tended to balloon their bohemian days in the Fifth and Sixth arrondissements into a generational event. *The Sun Also Rises* skewed things even more for me.

Thomson squirmed but continued to listen as I told him of an arresting experience I had years after the war when I returned to Paris the second time and saw it for the first time. By then I had read what I could about the expatriates and their era, and it was enchantingly obvious to me that American ghosts from the twenties dwell in the city. I see and hear them each time I return. Hemingway sits dreaming before Marshal Ney's statue in front of the Closerie des Lilas. Scott Fitzgerald is obnoxiously drunk in the bar of the Ritz. Gertrude Stein lumbers through the silent courtyard of 27 rue de Fleurus. Sylvia Beach opens the shutters on her bookshop in the rue de l'Odéon. In the city's cafés, bars, bistros, shops, racetracks, parks, theaters, railroad stations, streets, hotels, and flophouses, so many of the ghosts have made these stones of Paris indelibly American. That did it.

Thomson became agitated and took me on, not as a stranger, but as some kind of fallen soul who needed to be shriven of the sins he must have found in my manuscript. Apparently, that's what those double columns of page numbers were about.

He wondered aloud, Why not a Spanish Paris, a German one, an Italian one? I parried by mentioning the quai Voltaire, the several hundred yards of Left Bank between the Pont Royal and the Pont du Carrousel across the Seine from the vast brooding south wing of the Louvre. I told him that when my wife and I stay at the Hôtel du Quai Voltaire (Nineteen), I can hear him playing the piano next door at Seventeen where he lived from 1927 until the Second World War and kept a flat for some years thereafter. Thomson once called it

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a "magic locale." "But," he scolded, "the plaque on the hotel recalls a German." (Wagner completed the libretto of *Die Meistersinger* at Nineteen.) I countered that it is not Wagner's music I hear, but Virgil Thomson's. When I lean out the window and see the smashing panorama of Paris, I think of it as Virgil Thomson saw it in the twenties, not as Wagner did in the last century. Since he couldn't argue with my delusion, he seemed resigned to accept it or, more likely, forget about it, although he did concede that "perhaps some cafés and hotels" have the American imprint.

It appeared as if he had gone through the manuscript syllable by syllable, leaving delicately penciled comments and queries on a number of pages, then meticulously logging the page numbers in columns on the memo pad sheets before him. Whatever I was in for, the time he gave the critique was a modest suggestion of something abundant about the man's spirit.

His overall criticism was that of a teacher who never grades higher than B. He groused a begrudgingly gentle word about the writing, then hastened to say that the piece seemed like a reworking of *Virgil Thomson*. True, I said, but I knew of no more reliable source of information about his life. He had no difficulty agreeing. When I asked what books he recommended for their biographical value he immediately named *Virgil Thomson*, thought a moment, then added *Americans in Paris* by George Wickes and *Virgil Thomson: His Life and Music* by Kathleen Hoover and John Cage.

For a moment he was avuncular when he tried to raise me from the social depths by condemning my use of the word *home* in the manuscript. "I want to get that word *home* out of your vocabulary," he scolded. "It's lower-class, like a 'magnificent home.' Say anything—flat, apartment—but not home." It was the first time I ever heard that. I determined I should never again show such lack of breeding.

Throughout the piece he had flagged what he insisted were inaccuracies. For example, I had written about Parc de Monceau, a small, elegant greenery about a mile above the Etoile in a section of the city where, Thomson recalled, "vocal teachers and successful singers" lived during the twenties. Gilded railings enclosed the park, which, until the Revolution, was a fashionable resort where plays, balls, and great parties enriched the setting. In 1870 the city acquired it and turned it into a handsome public garden landscaped with pines and palms and ornamented with a monument to Chopin, Ambroise Thomas with the figure of Mignon and Gounod with statues of Marguerite, Juliette, Sappho, and the Genius of Music. In September 1921, at the beginning of a one-year Harvard traveling fellowship, Thomson rented a flat at nearby 20 rue de Berne. He once called the place, "a *maison meublée* that was really a mild sort of whorehouse—very convenient for me, because the girls went out to work every night and I could work at the piano without annoying anyone." What bothered him was my use of "Parc de Monceau." He was adamant that there is no "de" in the name.

By now I was shedding any anxiety I might have had about being dressed down by a major American cultural figure and was actually beginning to enjoy the attack as some lawyers do when they are armed with authority for statements splenetic judges challenge. Parc de Monceau was one of the names I found in my copy of Baedeker's 1924 *Paris and Its Environs*, a work I said was useful not only because it was published in the middle of the era but because it was dense with valuable history of the city. *Baedeker* provoked a staccato, "But that's German!" Then he rose, walked quickly to a bookshelf across the room, opened a volume, scowled and said, "You're right, but we always called it Parc Monceau."

In the piece, I sketched some background to Thomson's first trip to Paris with the Harvard Glee Club in 1921. At the time he was entering his junior year. He had written that, when Diaghilev brought the Ballet Russe to Paris in 1909, the company "lit up the West." Even that city, which should have been conditioned to the turbulence of early twentieth-century artistic innovation, was stunned by repeated bursts of fiercely brilliant ensembles of music, paint, and dance—Diaghilev productions, Fokine choreography, Nijinsky's unearthly flights, the first Stravinsky scores for the ballet, and sets and costumes by such talented painters as Picasso, Matisse, Dufy, Braque, and Marie Laurencin. French composers Erik Satie and *Les Six* added to the tumult. Jean Cocteau was a hero to *Les Six*, although Thomson admonished me to call him a promoter instead.

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By the twenties, Paris had never heard such a range of music—primordial sounds of *Le Sacre du Printemps*, syncopations of low-life American jazz played on rinky-dink café pianos and concert hall Pleyels, and the mocking, austerely ironic naïveté of Satie's works. The music of the twenties overwhelmed the German dominance of preceding decades, turning Paris into what Aaron Copland called "an international proving ground for all the newest tendencies in music," and Thomson was caught up in it.

During Christmas 1921, Le Boeuf sur le Toit, one of the best remembered bars in Paris of the twenties, opened at 28 rue Boissy d'Anglas just above the Place de la Concorde. At the beginning of that year a ballet by the same name had its premiere at the Comédie des Champs Elysées. Its sets, the work of the then relatively unknown artist Raoul Dufy, depicted an amiable saloon, "The Nothing Happens Bar." "Nothing Doing," corrected Thomson. Actors with names like Red-headed Lady, Policeman, and Gentleman in Evening Dress wore large cardboard heads. No, Thomson said, they were papier-mâché. (Although they weren't, I let this one pass.) They moved through fifteen minutes of slow-motion gestures so mindless they proved there was no intended meaning in the work. Darius Milhaud's score was meant to be no more than the frivolous accompaniment for a Chaplin film, but Cocteau saw more there. Cocteau gave frequent evening receptions at the bar and a pair of Francis Picabia's Dada canvases added to the *avant* tone of the place. Its proprietor was a man named Moyses.

Thomson claimed I misspelled *Moyses*. When I told him I got the spelling from him, he sprang for *Virgil Thomson*, allowed that *Moyses* was correct, then shrugged his way to my next lapse. I began to feel I was gaining on him.

Moyses had another bar, La Gaya, which was three blocks away on the rue Duphot. The pianist-composer Jean Wiener performed his own works there as well as popular American jazz and played the new compositions of Webern, Schoenberg, and Stravinsky. The place was usually packed and reached its moment of glory on an evening the audience, which included Artur Rubinstein and the then Prince of Wales, heard Cocteau play the drums. Thomson accepted that account but dissented when I wrote that the bar was decorated in white tile suggestive of the public lavatories of Paris. "No," he said, "the lavatories were done in colored tiles." I'm certain it was pure perversity that put him one up again.

Although he was hardly in need of reflected glory, he was irritated by an omission. In my reference to his American army service during the First World War—sixteen months in various domestic assignments—he wanted me to add that a Kansas City field artillery unit in which he served was "the one from Kansas City in which Harry Truman was a captain."

In October 1921 Thomson began walking regularly from his first Paris apartment to Nadia Boulanger's residence at nearby 36 rue Ballu. A teacher of composition who was to become an elemental influence in twentieth-century composition, Boulanger at the time was giving instruction in counterpoint and organ performance at the Ecole Normale de Musique and in harmony at the Conservatoire. For him she was a woman whose charm came in part from a maternal warmth. Her unnerving ability to zero in on all the places her students were having difficulty with their compositions was tempered by her great generosity toward them, many of whom could not afford her fees. With some amusement, she was resigned to her observation that there were three kinds of pupils. She took two of them—those with money and no talent, and those with talent and no money. She said that those with both were students she never got.

Thomson initially studied organ and counterpoint, then composition with Nadia Boulanger, and he particularly appreciated her special way of putting him at ease in front of music paper. Her final objective was to give her students the freedom to compose their own music after they had faithfully done her rigorous drill. He did not disagree with my account of her teaching, but aggressively rejected any suggestion that Boulanger's gift to him was the development of his critical faculty. He claimed he had a critical faculty before he studied with her. When I asked him to summarize what, then, she did for him, he replied, "It's in the book." I didn't argue, but whatever she did is not in the book.

Unable to renew his Harvard fellowship, Thomson returned to the United States and graduated in 1923 (class of 1922). During the next two years, he studied conducting in New York and began to write about music for mag-

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azines. H. L. Mencken got him started with an article in the *American Mercury* that attempted to answer a question Mencken assigned, "What Is Jazz?" He also began contributing monthly pieces to *Vanity Fair*, got himself fired from a church organist's post in Worcester, Massachusetts, and decided to return to Paris. He had saved a little money earned from playing the organ and assisting Harvard teachers Archibald T. Davison and Edward Burlingame Hill. With this nest egg and *Vanity Fair*'s request for articles, he returned to Paris in 1925, this time to stay. If he was going to starve, he "preferred to starve where the food is good." He picked up where he had left off with Boulanger.

Our talk about Boulanger led to Gertrude Stein, and Thomson's singular relationship with her. They met during the summer of 1925 at her salon when she asked Sylvia Beach to bring the *enfant terrible* American composer George Antheil to tea. It was a standard Stein gambit for checking into the latest subject of Paris cognoscenti gossip. Antheil brought Thomson along as his psychological bodyguard.

While Alice B. Toklas put Antheil through her standard preliminary inspection, Thomson missed the screening, and he and Stein quickly found they were thoroughly compatible wits. "Gertrude and I got on like Harvard men." Antheil, on the other hand, was never asked back. Thomson moved to the nearby Hôtel Jacob et Angleterre on rue Jacob and not only became a regular at Stein teas and Christmas parties, but in less than a year he was a member of the household in nearly all respects but his residential address.

More than anything else in his Paris years, it was his collaboration with Stein on the opera *Four Saints in Three Acts* that gave Virgil Thomson his first visibility in the United States as a composer of promise. Like the vast bulk of Stein's other work, her libretto was a stewpot of literary sports—jingles and riddles, interminable repetition, naked word plays, stage directions as text, the opening line of *America*, long trains of abstract words carrying no meaning, and thoughts tumbling from a mind oblivious of prior restraint. When the libretto asks for a tally of its saints and acts, the answer is "Ring around a rosy." Like the saints, the acts were also miscounted—there were more or less four, not three. The libretto was neither emotional nor expressive, but made the kind of verbal patterns that Thomson felt were more important to opera than meaning. He believed that most opera plots, and texts as sung, were unintelligible anyway.

In June 1927, Stein completed the libretto, and that November, Thomson moved into his studio apartment at 17 quai Voltaire. The next day he began composing *Four Saints* on a rented Pleyel piano. Each day he worked without notes of any kind, singing and playing improvised melodies and harmonies to fit the Stein text, which was spread before him on the piano. He knew he had set the first act when it "would improvise itself every day in the same way." At the beginning of December he was able to write all of it from memory, and by the middle of the month he had a score with vocal lines and figured bass.

On Christmas he gave a dinner party at his flat for twelve good friends, among them Stein and Toklas, the poet Georges Hugnet, and Tristan Tzara, the father of Dada. His patroness, Mrs. Chester Whitin Lasell, had arranged with Rosa Lewis, the former cook of King Edward VII and owner of the Cavendish Hotel, to send a huge *fois gras en croute*, plum pudding, and Stilton. To round out the feast, Thomson laid on a chicken aspic, apple and walnut salad, and champagne. The pièce de résistance was the first performance of act 1 of *Four Saints*. Measured by the reactions of Stein and Tzara, the audience enjoyed it greatly.

"So what with parties and people, with new clothes and stable measurements (for I patronized a Russian gymnast who could keep me at 135 pounds), and with the opera advancing by leaps, time stopped once more. Nothing seemed to be going on, because everything was going right."

The event that took him from the hermetic world of musical Paris to a public position in our national life was the 1934 premiere of *Four Saints*. With the help of Henry-Russell Hitchcock, who was then teaching in the art department at Wesleyan University, A. Everett Austin, the director of Hartford's Wadsworth Athenaeum, chose the opera and a major Picasso exhibition to open a new wing of the museum. A nonprofit New England society, The Friends and Enemies of Modern Music, sponsored the production that Thomson came from Paris to oversee. The dress rehearsal on February 7, 1934, drew a chic

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audience of social and arty New Yorkers and press coverage to match.

Within a day, horse laughs were heard throughout the land. The Stein libretto evoked it, especially the passage in which Saint Ignatius and the male chorus sang "Pigeons on the grass alas." Stein's ramblings, Florine Stettheimer's feathery cellophane and seashell sets, John Houseman's direction, Frederick Ashton's choreography, the all-Negro cast Thomson chose for its excellent diction, and his score had combined to produce a senseless, peculiarly beautiful, and exciting evening of theater. "Inspired madness," the critic for the *New York Times* called it.

When *Four Saints* opened in New York, journalists, too, found manna in Stein's libretto. Thomson stepped at last upon a stage for which he had prepared. As he told a group of friends the night before the dress rehearsal in Hartford, "You are looking at a young composer who is about to arrive."

He objected that he never would have said such a thing. But I told him that I got the quote from a magazine piece by Harold C. Schonberg. He seemed too embarrassed or annoyed with himself to concede he might have made such a statement.

However strong his reactions to what I had written, there was nothing to suggest that I had personally offended him, except in using the image of ghosts in Paris. He got the idea that I had, in effect, finished him off by including him among the American specters there. I assured him that that was never my intention, my point being simply that, whether dead or alive, these Americans had once enjoyed experiences in Paris so intense that their memory refuses to fade. It seemed to placate him.

Just about everything Thomson had to say that afternoon came wrapped in sandpaper. Reflecting on his sustained petulance, his vigor at eighty-two, and how productively he lived for another ten years, I am reminded of something I read about Sir Basil Blackwell, the British publisher and bookseller who died in 1984 at age ninety-four. Asked on his ninetieth birthday about his prescription for longevity, he answered that it was "being in a constant state of mild irritation." Thomson must have taken the same medicine. He did, however, seem to moderate when he accepted my account of his mood and attitude about his native land during the twenties.

Thomson was one of America's expatriates who settled in Paris without condemning America. He was not fleeing from anything. Like a number of other foreign composers, he chose to live there because music in France looked to the twentieth century. It was not a road to riches nor was it, as in painting, a road to fame. "Music was for musicians and for people with brains; it was not for mass consumption. And it was not, as in Germany, big business."

His personal and professional enthusiasm for Paris and France never hid the dark complaint supposedly heard from many Americans who settled in Paris during the twenties that their native land was a cultural sink. Malcolm Cowley had written of how Anglophilic English professors at Ivy League colleges had shamed their students into believing that America was barren of deserving literary themes. Thomson, on the contrary, thrived on putting America into his music. His writing about music in the twenties lacks any suggestion that George F. Babbitt's values fouled the native materials that Thomson drew upon.

During the twenties he found music in two lands—America and France—each of them fat with honest native themes. Both were places that gave a good deal more than they took away. "France was more than just another country, like England or Germany, or even very special, like Spain or China, but a miracle spot like ancient Greece or the United States." "Paris," Thomson wrote, "was where I felt most at home."

Of all the days Virgil Thomson lived happily in Paris, none seemed quite so close to perfection as those he spent there in 1927 and 1928 when he was composing *Four Saints*. At thirty, he was living a thoroughly fulfilled life. He needed a personal world of bright stimulating friends, and he had it in Paris. "Heavens! Everybody was there!" He needed the kind of public environment only Paris could offer, and now it was at his front door. Above everything else, he needed to make music on his own terms, and now he was doing it.

This was the gist of purposeful living, and similar witness can be heard over and over again in the clearly directed lives of many American expatriates during the era. The historical reality of their existence mocked the myth of the lost generation. I had come to this conclusion long before that Sunday afternoon, but I kept it to myself since I was there to hear

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Thomson out on the subject. I wound up the afternoon by encouraging him to talk, or, more accurately, fulminate about it.

What set him off was something I raised near the end of the afternoon—his thoughts about the lost generation and *The Sun Also Rises* set. Hemingway, whom he knew, "was in a hard-drinking crowd. I wasn't." Thomson claimed that Hemingway used the idea purely for "self-promotion" or "self-advertisement." He was infuriated by the epigraph in *The Sun Also Rises* attributed to Gertrude Stein "in conversation": "You are all a lost generation." "Gertrude," he said, "didn't use the term as a description of lost souls, but simply she got it from a hotel keeper in the south of France to describe young men who lost years in the military service when they would have been learning a vocation. A young man in that generation lost his trade, not himself."

He believed that authors like Hemingway succeed because they write about failures who are always other people, never themselves. He was certain that readers enjoy stories of flops, and said that Hemingway knew this and capitalized on it in books like *The Sun Also Rises.*

Thomson rejected the idea that there was anything like a generation of lost Americans in Paris. Yes, he remarked, there were individual drunks or drug addicts, but never whole groups. I cited Cowley's thesis in *Exile's Return* that the young Americans who drove ambulances for the French and Italian armies during the First World War were observers rather than participants in the carnage, and this "spectatorial attitude" greatly affected their view of the world. This second mention of Cowley that afternoon seemed to touch an exposed nerve. Thomson condemned him for making himself the owner or official historian of the American literary twenties in Paris, charging that in the 1930s Cowley, like Hemingway, contrived the lost generation thesis of *Exile's Return* purely for his own selfish purposes. Then he finished off Cowley with an epithet in common use among owners of dog kennels. Through his teeth he said something about knowing Cowley from the Academy, presumably the American Academy of Arts and Letters. It would have been cheeky to pick up a bit of literary gossip, and, in any event, the afternoon was getting on.

Like Thomson's music, writing, and life, his concluding word on the subject was bone of the bone American. For me it was one of those rare conjunctions at which an authentic spoken truth happens to be just what you wanted to hear. He dispatched the whole lost generation business crisply. As far as he was concerned, it was simply "crap."

Coming from him, the word hardly seemed lower-class.

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Trouble in a Minnesota Town

NEAL BOWERS

The sign in the grocery window says,
NO MANGOES,
and everyone who passes
is seized with a tropical longing:
the sun sets hot orange;
a dense perfume
loiters along the street;
on the tongue is the memory
of something softer than spun honey.

Before daylight, the whole town
is mad for the flavor of mangoes.
A spicy sweetness, almost a cross
between cloves and ginger,
lodges in the brain like a stuck tune.
By noon the record shop
has sold out of calypso albums;
reggae and salsa are going fast.
In the square, someone is showing how
to dance the mambo, the rumba,
pleading for a partner to tango,
por favor, por favor.

When the sign goes up announcing
a sale on papayas, guavas, bananas, avocados,
it is already too late.
The people have begun to paint
their slogan on the walls—
MANGOES O MUERTE—
and the mayor has received
a list of demands:
Mangoes.
Mangoes.
Mangoes.
Mangoes.

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MEMOIR

Captain Wilder, T. N.

PAUL HORGAN

After many years of hoping to meet Thornton Wilder I was unwittingly provided with the style, and the power, to do so by the Honorable Henry L. Stimson, Secretary of War during World War II.

In July of 1942 I arrived at Miami Beach, Florida, to inspect the Army Air Force Officer Candidate School. My credentials had preceded me. I was therefore conducted immediately to the office of the Commanding General with deference and an air of circumstance.

The General already knew that over the signature of Mr. Stimson I was declared to be an "Expert Consultant to the Secretary of War," and further, all appropriate personnel were charged to provide me with every convenience and cooperation in my official mission. The ultimate authority—the eye, the disposal power of the Pentagon at its highest level—was the terror of commanders in the field. I, a civilian, as its embodied agent, was assumed to hold a direct channel to the ear and the terrific opinion of the Secretary, with all his control of high careers in the Army.

The result was that splendid, if slightly nervous, courtesies were extended to me, even to charming reproaches—"If only we had known in advance, Mr. Horgan, my wife and I," said the General, "would have wanted to give a little dinner dance for you at the Officers' Club; but in any case we'll hope to be seeing much of you while you are with us."

And more: the VIP suite was reserved for me at the Club, there would always be a car with driver, the chiefs of all sections would be advised of my schedule of inspection, and if I required any special demonstrations, I had only to ask. If I had not before been in Miami Beach, perhaps a tour of the area might be attractive? The Officer Candidates—a splendid group of six thousand of America's best young men—went through formal dress parade every afternoon at four, and the staff would be honored if I should agree to "take" the parade on whichever of my afternoons I might designate? Meanwhile, the aide would be my "guide and counselor" throughout my stay—and, continued the General, how *was* the Secretary, so remarkable at his age (he was seventy-five) in his heavily burdened post which he executed so brilliantly—it would be a kindness to be remembered to him if the occasion should present itself on my return to Washington? And so, until a quiet dinner this evening?

It was easy to fit myself into such anxious comforts; and I decided that in accepting them quietly I would the more efficiently see my job done. Living a fraud imposed from without, I enjoyed the concealed comedy of it, and went briskly about my business.

My official purpose and my official status were much less grand than they were assumed to be. A few weeks earlier I had been summoned to Washington to be commissioned in the Army as a captain, AUS, with the charge to write and produce an information film for troops on the Officer Candidate system, with a view to recruitment. I was attached to the film unit commanded by (then) Major Frank Capra. The papers for my commission were slow in being processed; in the meantime, my Pentagon boss, Colonel E. L. Munson, Jr., sent me out as a civilian to travel

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across the nation to all twenty-odd Officer Candidate schools to prepare my script describing what each branch of the Army offered—and required—toward the making of second lieutenants in ninety days of training. It was Colonel Munson, a virtuoso of War Department maneuvering, who arranged for my awesome credentials. My expenses were to be paid, and I would receive in addition one hundred dollars per diem as an "expert consultant." There must have been dozens of us so titled going about our jobs, bearing the famous letter signed by Mr. Stimson. While it lasted, then, I made the most of my grandeur.

Miami Beach was an early stop on my tour, which was to take me from coast to coast. There was no phase of OCS training that I did not observe, including mess halls, where I became a connoisseur of that equipment known as the "deep fat fryer," which mess officers seemed particularly proud to demonstrate. At the end of my tour I was to proceed to Hollywood, compose my shooting script, and then lead film crews to all the OC Schools once again, this time to shoot the film.

On my second day at Miami Beach I was escorted to the Officers' Club to have lunch with the Commanding General. It was a blistering hot day, but on the patio there was gently chattering shade under palm trees as air from the sea brought a drying coolness. I was seated at a round table with three generals and a staff colonel or two. At the next table were the three aides to my generals, well within call. By now we were all easy with each other. Conversation was full of enthusiastic shop, sensible and intelligent, ranging across activities of the School and service gossip.

One of the generals, in passing, said to his neighbor, "General,"—generals enjoyed addressing each other by rank—"General, did you happen to hear last night's Cultural Lecture?"

"No, General, matter-of-fact, Mrs. Magruder [this is a fictional name] and I spent the evening catching up on our correspondence. Who was the lecturer?"

"Let me see, I believe it was a Captain Wilder."

"Is he with the candidates?"

"No, he is one of the 're-treads.' "

"I see. You see, Mr. Horgan, in addition to the young candidates, we have people who have served before, in World War I, and are here for refresher training."

A spark of surmise. I asked, "What is Captain Wilder's full name, General?"

"Why, I'm afraid I don't know." He turned to the next table and called to his aide. "Buck, what is the full name of that Captain Wilder who gave the lecture last night? Were you there?"

"Yes, General. Captain Wilder, T. N., sir."

Thornton Niven Wilder. I must have lighted up.

"Do you know him, Mr. Horgan?"

"No, but I have long wanted to meet him." The General's face showed polite curiosity as to why. I added, "He is one of the most brilliant and distinguished of our living authors."

"Really!"

"Oh, yes—" and I recited a few titles: *The Bridge of San Luis Rey, Heaven's My Destination,* (both best-sellers), and surely everyone knew *Our Town,* our first universal American play?

"Very commendable, I'm sure."

"Would it be possible for me to meet Captain Wilder?" I asked.

"Why, of course, glad to oblige. The re-treads have their daily parade every afternoon just after the candidates' own parade. You'll be reviewing the first formation this afternoon. Captain Wilder's contingent will parade immediately after on the same field." The General turned to his aide. "Buck, set it up to have Captain Wilder fall out and report to Mr. Horgan right after the re-tread officers' parade."

"Yes, sir."

Report to me? I choked into my napkin.

At four o'clock the General's car (with its two white stars on its little red plate) delivered me and the aide to the long freeway of a golf course, which, like so much in Miami Beach, had been converted to wartime use. The golf course was now a parade ground. Six thousand officer candidates were marching to their initial parade formation as I was shown to the reviewing post. There awaited the commandant of the OCS and his staff. They ranged themselves to my left in the order of diminishing rank. As Secretary Stimson's stand-in, I wore invisible stars, and I was prepared to take the honors of the parade.

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Commands came thinly across the wide greensward. It was a humid, overcast day. Tropical heat soaked my seersucker suit. The march past began. The end of it was not even in sight in the moist distance. I took the salutes—national colors, squadron colors—with my hand over my heart. The band played, happy dogs danced along ahead. The wave upon wave of featureless pink faces going by, the scissors flash of chino legs clipping past made me giddy and I tensed my knees to keep control. Remarks were not out of order between the spaced salutes.

"Very fine," I said to the colonel on my left.

"We've done better, sir. But on a day like this, with their strenuous schedule, the ranks become a little ragged at times."

"Well," I said forgivingly, "you've clearly done a superb job with the training. I am honored to attend this."

I meant it. For all the fraudulent aspect of my honors, I was moved by the thought of the war, the country gearing itself up to it, and those faceless but invaluable lives marching by. When the last squad of the last platoon had made it past the reviewing stand, my feeling was no longer comic.

The aide brought me back to efficiency. He pointed to a small white circular pavilion with dome and pillars in the Greek style that stood a hundred yards away at the end of the freeway.

"See that little temple, sir?" he said. "That's where Captain Wilder has been ordered to meet you after his parade, which will follow in a little while. You just go up there and wait for him. If you're warm, you can have a Coke; there's a machine there—sort of a golfer's old rest stop. Jump in the car, sir. It will wait for you up there until you dismiss Captain Wilder."

Ordered? Dismiss? The innocent absurdities continued.

There were benches in the weathered wooden pavilion, and there I rested drinking a Coca Cola. Through the flaking pillars I had a straight long view of the parade ground from its upper end. Presently I saw the formation of the officer refresher group march into sight out of the mists of late afternoon. It was a company-sized group. From my distance they looked like toy soldiers going through their evolutions as if they had wind-up keys in their backs. They formed first in line, then in column, and then into a faraway march past. They executed a great square-about once more. I imagined Captain Wilder anonymously doing his part as a component of that collective moving machine, and I wondered what he would be thinking about. The column came into line facing the reviewing officer and halted.

A tiny pantomime took place in the distance.

The company commander gave an order, too far off for me to hear. The troops stood at ease. He addressed them, probably with what the Army called a critique. He gave another order. The troops came to attention. Another order, and from the rank in line a small figure stepped three paces forward. The commander pointed to him, then pointed to the pavilion where I sat waiting. A final order, the small figure saluted, smartly turned left face, and began to march toward me on the slightly rolling green freeway. Behind him the company was dismissed and drifted away at will.

In the perspective, the small figure persevered. It walked rapidly in a swinging stride, as though executing a parade all alone, *hut*-two-*hree*-faw, with unflagging vitality that suggested civil good nature and independent dignity, projecting the character of Thornton Wilder. He was assuming himself as he diminished the distance between us, and I went through the peristyle to meet him.

Yards away he opened the beam of his smile and extended his hand. He carried the effect of many traditions—he was Emerson, Teddy Roosevelt, Don Quixote, Montaigne, Catullus, Jefferson, Aeschylus, John Evelyn, and George Brush, all in one, and his khakis were sweated through as we shook hands and drew into the domed shade of the temple.

"Oh, oh, let me demilitarize myself!" he said taking off his soaked "overseas" cap with its captain's bars and shaking it.

"Would you like a Coke?"

"*Bitte.*"

With trifling ceremony he lifted his bottle to my health, and then, as he drank a full swig, his near eye held a long appraisal of me, as though deciding how he must see me. Evidently no adjustments were necessary. He gave an energetic breath and with his total smile he said something about our meeting at last, after years of sporadic correspondence, mutual friendships, and news through our

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common editor, Eugene Saxton at Harpers. He was in beaming health, trim, squared at the shoulders, tanned by Florida, and perfectly equal to the farcical rigors of being a re-tread.

"Isn't it killing?" he said, mocking the dated slang.

"?"

"This whole thing—marching, sir-ring, the treadmill!—What are *you* doing with it all?"

I explained my mission, my pending captaincy, how I'd found him, what a pleasure, and the rest—and was he comfortable in the anonymity (like T. E. Lawrence's) in the effacing military world?

"You can imagine?"—meaning he was enjoying it, though not in an uncritical way.

We had little time. The afternoon was expiring damply. I said, "Can you dine with me this evening?"

"No-no, you will dine with me. Do you like French cuisine?" I did. "Then I know just the place. Now I must shower and change."

"I too. I have a car—I'll drop you off now and come back."

We were driven to his small hotel, which had been requisitioned as barracks, and as he left the car, he said seriously, "Give me half an hour—but please: promptly. I must be back at eight o'clock for study hall."

Study hall? When I laughed he made an extra gleam of opinion through his glasses and dashed into the hotel.

At dinner he did the ordering in French without a glance at the menu, nodding his imperatives at the waiter. As in everything, he had a command presence, as the Army would have put it. Because of study hall, we could not have wine—at least he couldn't and I refrained.

He was smart and exhilarated in a fresh uniform; and if dinner was mostly his monologue, I can remember only its theme—not many particulars. But the burden was that the juvenility of the military sometimes ceased to be amusing. One of course conformed to everything, however absurd, and with the best of good cheer. At the same time, the ancient military habits of training, discipline, hierarchy, detachment from human compunction, and the dangers of authority too often vested in those incapable of wielding it sensitively or even sensibly went far beyond the materials of farce. In my notebook of the time I wrote down my immediate impressions of Captain Wilder in his unaccustomed circumstance.

> Mannerism: the bright, charming, nibbling at ideas and words, each so good, and the sudden arrest in place, the gaze, so unwinking, so straight, so accustomed to truth in its most wary haunt, and that was, in self as well as outward. . . . The selfless and strict and humble work (for such as he) to take on in middle life a new attitude and suffer its absurdities and inconveniences because it was an agreed-upon method of serving an end bigger and better than any *one*. . . . This was the real lesson. What it entailed: the alumni caperings of fat Babbitts—the ambient insensitiveness—the poor and earnest idiom of adjustment.

He felt it rather a relief to be able to share one's view of all that with someone still outside the system—and how good to be looking forward now to a *soufflé au chocolat* that would appear in a few minutes.

"All this," I said, "makes me feel like a visiting uncle, taking his nephew out of school on a pass before study hall." He was half a dozen years older than I.

"Yes, yes, I am the eternally aging student."

I asked him what would follow his present course of training.

"My next assignment is already scheduled. In a few weeks I go to the Air Corps Intelligence School at Harrisburg."

And what would his job be after that? Prepare manuals? historical records of the air services? that sort of writing?

"Never!" he answered in a subdued sort of shout. He kept his smile, but it became severe and his heavy brows seemed to bristle. "Never. *I shall not write for my country!*"

Feeling like a traitor to literature in my assignment of writing and producing an information film to recruit officer candidates, I welcomed the *soufflé* as it arrived. We dispatched it swiftly. Captain Wilder kept an eye on his wristwatch, and all too soon we were back in the two-starred staff car and at the door of his billet. He made a hearty farewell, all voluble thanks, enthusiastic references to postwar encounters, and was gone into the Miami Beach flocked stucco Spanish-type entrance at two minutes before eight. (Notebook: "An admirable and painful discipline from without for an artist of finest grain, used to imposing the strictest from within.")

By noon the following day, I was done with my local duty and on my way back to Washington, where the Secretary of War was ignorant of my return. In a few more days I

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resumed my tour, to be received at a dozen more OCS components with the familiar luxuries and blandishments, which I gladly suffered—until I reached Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and the field artillery. There in the course of inspecting the deep fat fryer and other points of pride, I was overtaken by a telegram from the Adjutant General of the Army announcing my commissioning effective immediately, with orders to report to Major Frank Capra's army film unit in Los Angeles. In a single official puff, the empowering spell of Secretary Stimson was dissipated. I became one of perhaps a quarter of a million captains in the Army. No more starred cars, orderlies, VIP suites, clever little dinner-dances at the Club, deferential messages for Mr. Secretary. Under somewhat more difficult conditions, I got on with my job, glad, even so, to be in uniform.

The postwar years went by without my seeing Wilder for quite some time; but I read him whenever he published, and about him, as he made his distinguished acts for style and culture. At the Goethe Festival in Aspen in 1949, on one day he simultaneously translated into English from the Spanish of José Ortega y Gasset, and on the next did the same from the German for Dr. Albert Schweitzer.

When Wilder gave the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures at Harvard in 1950–51, the *Atlantic Monthly* published the first three out of six scheduled to be given. I found these to be of such spirited originality, so brightly illuminating of central problems in our classical literature, and of the strong but sometimes stumbling energy of our American nature, that I wrote to him hoping for publication of the next three lectures. He replied that they were not ready to be published—they needed more work; but he was pleased to have my response. In fact, I was told by others that in giving the lectures, particularly the final three, he did not use fully prepared texts, but dramatically striding the platform from side to side, spoke from notes, or sometimes quite spontaneously without any notes at all; and I wondered if the missing three pieces had been extemporized, never to be recovered by him in usable form. Anyhow, the first three finally appeared in his posthumous book *American Characteristics*, edited by Donald Gallup, and many of the key concerns of these magnificent essays can be seen in embryo in his *Journals, 1939–1961*, also edited by Gallup and published even later. No critical historian of our literature can fail henceforth to be instructed by these diary entries.

Down the years, my path occasionally crossed with Wilder's. One day in Washington I was descending in the elevator of the Hay-Adams Hotel for breakfast. At a floor lower than mine, he entered the elevator without seeing anyone. Standing in front of me, he went out first and into the dining room. I felt sure that he would not, no more than I, welcome a recognition before breakfast. When I followed after a brief delay, it was to take a table two removed from his, along the same wall, but facing away from him. Behind me I heard him order breakfast—a burlier voice than I remembered, commanding *"café au lait,"* and when the Hispanic waiter did not understand: *"café leche, café leche,"* barked out, *"café leche!"* and the *Washington Post* whacked open with impatience.

Judging by the instructive little sounds of silver, china, glass, newsprint, I decided when I might venture to turn and greet him. He was just finishing. His greeting was warm. We had a second cup together. He was heavier than Captain Wilder, but as keen as ever in the moment. His speech was more rapid, punctuated by staccato intakes of breath that made witty even the simplest remark. We traded *bavardage* briefly, and then because his energy seemed geared to pressing affairs, I got up to go and said, "Sometimes I think of writing to you, but I wonder if Harpers is the best address. How to reach you at home?"

Like a schoolmaster he pointed to my vest pocket and said, "Your-book, your-book," readying me to take dictation.

When I had my pocket diary open and pencil poised, he said, "T.N.W.—Fifty Deepwood Drive, Hamden, Connecticut."

"What a nice sylvan address," I said idly, as I wrote.

"No-No. It's *kitsch*."

The word was then entering critical slang, and I was not familiar with it.

"What is *kitsch*?"

"You don't know what *kitsch* is?"

"No."

A sharp little breath as he pondered how to define it. Then he brightened with a comic light in his eye, and said, defining by illustration, "Thaïs is *kitsch*!"

I laughed at his method and meaning, he joined me, we said good-bye.

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A while later in New York I was entering the Century Club for lunch and met him coming out. After light greetings, I said, "I have something to tell you."

When he gave attention it was with an almost quivering alertness, as though he were creating and drawing out what was said to him: arcs of heavy eyebrows, dancing gleam of eyeglasses, inhaled exclamatory breaths marking intervals in what he heard.

I told him that since our Washington encounter I had reread his novel *The Ides of March*, which I suddenly hungered for on my travels *(a quick little drawn breath of pleasure)* and had to find a copy in a secondhand bookstore, as it was out of print *(ironic breath meaning "yes")* but the interesting thing was that it seemed almost everyone I ran into was *also* rereading *The Ides of March* with high admiration *(flex of brows)*, and I was delighted to report this to him.

With the friendliest teeth imaginable, he said, "Ah, yes, tell me, how-are-they-doing with *Black Beauty*?"

I had hoped to see him again in the summer of 1962, for as the organizer of a symposium in honor of Igor Stravinsky's eightieth birthday to be given by the Santa Fe Opera, I wrote to Wilder asking if he would give one of a series of lectures on phases of Stravinsky's achievement. All of the composer's operas would be given by the company. Others who had agreed to speak were Milton Babbitt, Carlos Chavez, Thomas Messer, Roger Shattuck, and Virgil Thomson.

Wilder replied from Germany, forecasting a retreat into an out-of-the-way village in Arizona where he would spend almost three years (one of the results of which would be his penultimate novel, *The Eighth Day*, a work that is like the harvest of a lifetime's wisdom).

Dear Paul

thanks for your letter and the honor of the invitation it extends.

That will be a great occasion: first to hear so many works of the great Master; and to be among those immediately extending our gratitude and admiration to him.

Your invitation comes, I am sorry to say, at a time when I can no longer accept it. In May I am going into a real retirement, long overdue. To live as a real hermit in a state adjacent to yours. I expect to live so for about two years and a half. —To loaf, to read, to learn Russian, to refresh my Greek, to hold my tongue—and finally to do some writing.

I feel sure you will understand this perhaps better than most and I ask you to express it diplomatically to those of your committee who sent me this generous invitation.

All cordial best to you,

ever

Thornton.

But once or twice during the exile he broke away to visit Santa Fe for a day or two. During one of these moments I happened to be in Santa Fe, and he telephoned to invite me to dine with him the next evening. With every regret I had to say that because of research for a piece I was to write I was obliged to leave early the next morning for Phoenix and Tucson.

"Yes, you-must, you-must," he said, so fast that it sounded dismissive.

By the time I returned, he was gone—back to his hermitage in Arizona. We did not meet again until several years later in Connecticut, when an old and protective friend of his, Mrs. William Sloane Coffin, of New Haven, telephoned me at Middletown asking me to come with only two others to join Thornton Wilder for an evening at her house.

He arrived last, made the round of greetings with hearty lightness, and then set himself at the edge of a sofa. He held and rarely sipped from a glass of whiskey. He was older, heavier in figure, but not in style or spirit. Seeing him again—it was to be for the last time—I had a sense of summary.

His very presence was an assertion, not aggressive, simply vital. Of some people it is said that they wear their learning lightly. He possessed his dismissively. His thought raced, and his speech with it, though always with clarity and dramatically accented point. Not serious about himself, he held a lyrical and tragic view of life, though most often he played everything through comedy, even farce. If his natural climate of mind and spirit was his great residue of the Mediterranean classical world, he searched for the universal in the American vernacular style of life and expression. His energies of personality had their confirmation in his elderly physical substance and social bearing. Not tall, he was compactly assembled and tense with strength. His head was large, and under heavy brows his eyes behind glasses were bright and dark.

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He wore a clipped mustache that accented his smiling mouth. His smile was comradely whether it covered opinions damaging or confirming. In flashes of courtesy he took each person present with individual address. To me, at a moment's lull in the general talk, he turned and exclaimed, "Great Paul!" and allowed a small silence to convey something warm and regardful that moved me.

Mention came up about his recent birthday—the seventieth. I can only repeat what I have recorded elsewhere. He told us with great gaiety how Goethe declared that "each of us is born with some inner resonance that for all our lives tells us what our ideal age is, no matter what our years may say." Thornton rayed us all with his smile and said, "*I* was an old man when I was twelve, and now I *am* an old man, and *it's splendid!*"

Before Poetry There Is Truth

JAY A. BLUMENTHAL

Instead of flying south last spring
to prey upon that lovely summer thing
or mating that widow of careless mind
to my appetite for passion's webbed design,
I should have known what I learned before
I climbed into the teeth of metaphor:
namely, my grounding in the spider's lesson,
good for soul or heart or lower intestine—
that of all the ways to write a poem,
nature favors those who stay at home.

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Poems

BRUCE GUERNSEY

Flatbush Avenue

His father walked out one day when Gleason was nine and never came back.

—Newsweek

On Flatbush, a skinny kid
now nearly ten,
sets out for home
from P.S. 101
and while the other tenement kids
with dreams of their own
like balls in their mitts
go off to play together,
he takes off alone, meeting
as he goes along
the many failures he'd become:
the hapless Poor Soul
down-and-out as a Brooklyn flat;
some loud-mouth driver,
cursing fate, his bus
broken down at the corner;
old Mr. Dunahee, out on the streets, the law
boarding up all the bars.

In the evening's dim,
alone on the stoop
before he must go in
he lifts a dream baton
to the streetlamps
one-by-one

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coming slowly on,
and in the stage lights' glare
gropes through the curtain
at the end of the show,
all swagger, all sweat,
wrapped in the wealth
of a boxer's silk robe
to wave us all good-night
who'd laughed till we'd cried—
to throw a kiss
to the cheering dark,
to wherever his father went.

The Blind Cavefish

In my tank, that eight-gallon world
I governed like a god,
turning the light on or off at will,
the Neon Tetras darted all day,
an iridescence of green and blue;
in schools of silver stripes
the Zebras never slowed down
except at night and in the morning
zipped around the Angel Fish
with its trailing fins of lace,
attendants to a graceful bride.
Guppies, snails, a fat pair
of Black Mollies always mating,
algae like moss, plants with Latin names
only a priest could pronounce,
their vines like tentacles
in and out the gingerbread house

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with its bubbling chimney pumping air,
a Hansel and Gretel place
where the Blind Cavefish,
shy, pale, vulnerable in the light, would hide.

After school, in my attic room,
I'd eclipse the sun of this tiny world,
pull the shades and sit by the tank, alone.
The thrill in my blood, even now,
feeling him stir,
his slow nudging through the door,
his caution, then growing ease
the way I wait, first afraid,
then slipping into sleep
with fins through the darkness,
for centuries in caves,
my eyes, sealed over, without a trace,
the night as palpable as waves
and light, some ancient dream.

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Oxford Revisited

Gerard Manley Hopkins, 1878–79

ROBERT BERNARD MARTIN

In the late autumn of 1878, a thirty-four-year-old Jesuit priest, Gerard Manley Hopkins, arrived in Oxford after an absence of a decade. Like many men, he remembered his undergraduate career as the golden period of his life; it had transformed a shy freshman from a minor school in Highgate, London, into the "star of Balliol." At Balliol, then easily the foremost college in Oxford, he distinguished himself by taking highest honors, a "double first" in Classics. More important, perhaps, he there developed a great talent for friendships, of which one became the central emotional event of his life, when he met—for a few days only—a young man named Digby Dolben, who shared his own poetic ambitions and a deep religious interest, which in both young men was moving from High Church Anglicanism closer and closer to Roman Catholicism. Dolben's affections seem to have been far less involved than Hopkins's. Two years after they were introduced, he died suddenly in a swimming accident, but their meeting was still green in Hopkins's memory.

Meanwhile Hopkins had become a convert to Roman Catholicism and was received into the Church by John Henry (later Cardinal) Newman, who had also been at Oxford before his own conversion. Hopkins entered the Society of Jesus in 1868 and was ordained in 1877. There followed six months of teaching in a Jesuit school near Chesterfield, then a stay of several months in London at the Jesuit church in Farm Street, Mayfair, the most fashionable Catholic church in the city, known almost equally for the number of converts it attracted, many from the aristocracy, and for the quality of its sermons and its liturgical music. Hopkins expected that this would be a permanent assignment, but he failed to make much impression at Farm Street, and he was moved on to fill other vacancies in the Jesuit province. Permanence for a Jesuit, he said, was "ginger-bread permanence; cobweb, soapsud, and frost-feather permanence." Oxford was full of highly intelligent university men, as much in love with poetry and religion as he: it promised to be the perfect spot for him to re-create his triumphs of a decade earlier and finally to make his mark as a priest.

Hopkins's appointment at Farm Street may have been intended from the beginning as an interim or probationary position, for it was never easy for the Jesuits to find the right duty for this extraordinary priest. Clearly he was brilliant, almost frighteningly devout, and selfless in parish work, but he was also self-contained to the point of seeming withdrawn. For all his tractability and obedience, his manner sometimes failed to demonstrate absolute submission to his clerical superiors in mental and moral questions, and now and then there was a hint of condescension to

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The author thanks the English Province of the Society of Jesus for permission to quote brief extracts from *Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins, including his Correspondence with Coventy Patmore*, edited by C. C. Abbott, 2nd edition, Oxford University Press, 1970.

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parishioners. When he did not work out as expected at Farm Street, it must have seemed an inspired solution to send him back to Oxford, scene of his scholarly successes and conversion, and where his heart so clearly lay. In the middle of November 1878, he went to Oxford as curate in St. Aloysius's church, which had been consecrated only three years before, and which he had not yet seen.

Apparently Hopkins had not been in Oxford "except once for three quarters of an hour" since taking his degree in 1868. To any man first returning to his university, change is far more evident than continuity. The occasion is usually his initial awareness of the brevity of undergraduate history and of his own relegation to that gray mass of the elderly made up of all those who have passed out of academic life. It is a shock to realize that to a man of twenty, a thirty-four-year-old is scarcely younger than a sexagenarian even if, like Hopkins, he is sympathetic with the young.

When Hopkins's friend and contemporary Henry Scott Holland had been gone from Oxford less than a year, he wrote of his sense of loss: "I can hardly help crying to think of the old Balliol days that are over; the dear old place that has been meat and bread to me all these years; no more to link her name with mine, no more to be hand and glove in all her life; this is dreadful." For Hopkins much more time than that had passed since he had last walked out of the gates of Balliol, and the poignancy of his feeling of separation was heightened by his knowledge that much of it was due to his own conversion.

St. Aloysius's was the culmination of years of trying to get a more suitable and central Catholic church in Oxford than the ramshackle little chapel of St. Ignatius in St. Clement's, which Hopkins had attended as an undergraduate and which he loved because it had been the first Roman Catholic church in which his idol, Newman, had made a public appearance after his own conversion. As Newman put it, "A back yard in St. Clements and a barn to say Mass in, are not the proper representatives of the visible Church."

The new church, however, was big and graceless, looking more French than English, and usually described as being in the "Transition" style, which was one way of avoiding more precise definition. It had cost £7000 and was built to the plans of Joseph Aloysius Hansom of Birmingham, by 1878 one of the leading architects in the wave of new Catholic churches, some of which inevitably reminded the observer that he was also the designer of the hansom cab. When Hopkins first saw it, the yellow brick of which it was built had not yet been softened by soot and time; the gaunt, high-shouldered bulk stood at the beginning of the Woodstock Road, at the junction between ancient Oxford and the new suburbs of red-brick propriety erupting to the north.

A row of shops formed a screen that hid the church from the street, except for a narrow pathway leading back to the door. As the private magazine of the Jesuits admitted candidly a century later, "There was, at the time of the new church . . . the danger or supposed danger of the building being rushed by a mob, and so the actual church was set back from the street, with a narrow entrance that even now can't take a fire engine."

As its builders had feared, there was a great deal of hostility to the new church, so threateningly close to the center of the city. In a burst of Protestant indignation, the *Oxford and Cambridge Undergraduate's Journal* said that the only reason for the Jesuits' "being in Oxford is their singular skill in argument, persuasion, and propagandism" and that the "avowed object of the church is to reclaim students, and to bring them back to the true fold."

The journal was in part right to suspect that St. Aloysius's had been intended to stimulate the flow of Oxford converts, following on the first great wave of conversions during the earlier part of the Oxford Movement. The consistent appointment of convert priests to serve it indicated the hope that clerical example might inspire another generation of undergraduates to come to Rome. This is presumably why Hopkins had seemed unusually qualified to go there from Farm Street.

The truth was that the Jesuits wanted badly to recruit for the middle ranks of the Roman Church in England; at the top there had always been a residual few of the aristocracy, mostly descended from Recusants, and there had always been the lower classes, many of them from Ireland and Scotland. But there had not been an educated and professional middle class in the Church in England for centuries, and it was that unhealthy gap that the Jesuits recognized and sensibly thought to begin filling by conversions from the universities.

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The priest in charge of the church in 1878 was Father Thomas Brown Parkinson, whom Hopkins had known at Stonyhurst. He was formerly a Church of England clergyman, and, according to his obituary, "Father Parkinson's manner through life still retained much resemblance to that of an Anglican parson, and was particularly suave, serious almost to demureness, and impressive by reason of the judicial gravity and air of conviction with which he in measured terms pronounced his opinion." One undergraduate in Hopkins's time remembered him as both in appearance and character "the most typically English, John Bullish person I have ever known."

Some of his fellow Jesuits pretended to believe that Parkinson's initials stood for "Truly Benevolent," and in time this slid over into the less flattering undergraduate name for him, "Extreme Unction." He was known, both within the Church and without, as being unusually receptive to conversions, but one near-convert who slipped through his plump fingers was Oscar Wilde, who regularly came to breakfast but got no further on the road to Rome until years later.

Hopkins was so different in temperament from his expansive "chief" that, after leaving Oxford, he admitted that he had never got on easily with him. Parkinson was thought by some to be "distant, close-handed, and perhaps a little selfish." Hopkins might have added that he also expected a great deal of work from a curate, since he was asked to do everything that had been taken care of earlier by two priests. It should be added in favor of Parkinson that he had got on well with the Irish members of his parish in Glasgow, and it was perhaps in recognition of that skill that he had been brought to Oxford, with Hopkins added as his assistant to lend intellectual weight to the presbytery.

With some reason the clergy of St. Aloysius's felt that the University authorities totally ignored them except when trying to keep undergraduates from attending their services, and that they were habitually regarded from afar with the innate distrust most Englishmen felt for Jesuits.

Their fellow Roman Catholics distrusted converts from the Oxford Movement as much as Anglicans did. Convert priests were always suspect, and some ignorant parishioners refused to be baptized or confessed by them, or to receive Communion at their hands, in the belief that ordination, even within the Church, could not be valid for such men. It could hardly have been a more trying position for Hopkins, returning to the city he loved and finding that he was now an outsider from both Anglicans and Roman Catholics. To be a convert was bad enough, to be a Jesuit was to be doubly suspect.

Unfortunately, the flood of university-trained deserters from the Church of England had dwindled in Oxford to little more than a trickle. In 1879 there were thirty-nine converts in the parish of St. Aloysius's, but few of them were from the middle class. In the University the real growth in religious fervor was in High Church Anglicanism, and as its popularity waxed, the Roman conversions waned. Across Walton Street, only a few hundred yards from St. Aloysius's, lay the new High Church parish of St. Barnabas, in which the church had been consecrated the year after Hopkins took his degree. At the other end of Oxford, not far from the chapel in St. Clement's, were the Anglican Cowley Fathers and their mission, from which they were to be seen emerging daily, striding around the city, conspicuous in their habits. St. Thomas's, which for years had been a lonely bastion of Ritualism near the railway station, was now only one, and not the most important, of the Oxford churches where incense, confession, and reservation of the Sacrament were to be found. It was to these churches that the fickle youth of the University were going. "When I first knew Oxford, Catholicism was hardly in the picture at all," wrote one Catholic undergraduate of Hopkins's time. Between St. Barnabas's in Jericho and Cowley at the eastern extreme of the city, all Oxford seemed in possession of High Church.

Once the natural drift in Oxford had been from Ritualism to Roman Catholicism at St. Aloysius's, a progression indicated in a much later rhyme attributed to Ronald Knox:

> The rather-rathers
> Go to the Cowley Fathers;
> But the whole-hoggers
> Go to Allowoggers.

In 1878, however, it had begun to seem that Ritualism, by offering so much that had previously been the sole province of Rome, was actually stopping conversions.

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In Oxford, St. Barnabas's had been established in Jericho, the mean quarter lying between Walton Street and the canal. It was intended for the spiritual welfare of the residents who worked in the University Press and the small factories nearby, but it had become unexpectedly fashionable, drawing precisely those members of the University that St. Aloysius's wanted to attract. Even Walter Pater was to be seen there occasionally. As a Fellow of one college said, "When I want a spiritual fling I go to St. Barnabas'." On Sundays the narrow streets of Jericho were choked with carriages, and undergraduates poured in to fill all twelve hundred seats for the 11:00 A.M. High Celebration ("High Mass" was still not in common usage among Ritualists). The music was superbly performed, with Merbecke eventually giving way to Gounod and Mozart. The vicar and his two curates were all Christ Church men and celebrated in full vestments before tall candles scarcely visible through the haze of incense in the sanctuary. It was hard for St. Aloysius's to hold its own in this kind of competition, and one bewildered convert, who had been a parishioner at St. Barnabas's, complained sadly that worship at St. Aloysius's seemed extremely bare, even spartan, in comparison.

It was noticeable elsewhere that many of the most militantly Ritualistic churches were in slums or unfashionable areas, as were both St. Barnabas's and the Cowley Fathers. And it was undeniable that their very location gave worshippers the pleasant thrill of ecclesiastical adventure, even of something illicit, that attendance at a Roman Catholic church had once done. In its bid for respectability in Oxford, St. Aloysius's had succeeded only in achieving a dull lower-middle-class sobriety in a building of considerable banality. The tall Italianate campanile that Blomfield had designed to soar above the stark walls of St. Barnabas's was plainly visible from St. Aloysius's and seemed to dwarf it both architecturally and in spiritual attraction.

To the east of St. Aloysius's, even closer than St. Barnabus's lay on the west, stood the brand-new chapel of Keble, the High Church college built in memory of the founder of the Oxford Movement and consecrated the year after St. Aloysius's. Rising boldly above the entrance to the University Parks, the blindingly red and white chapel seemed an emblem of the triumph of Tractarianism in Oxford. Perhaps most telling for Hopkins was the fact that it had been designed by the one modern architect he admired unreservedly, William Butterfield, whose buildings he had traveled around the country to see. Bracketed by two of the triumphs of Victorian architecture, St. Barnabas's and Keble, both of them Anglican, St. Aloysius's dwindled into visual unimportance in the city Hopkins loved best.

St. Aloysius's must have seemed doubly bare to Hopkins after Farm Street, one of the few Catholic churches in the country then famous for vestments, liturgy, and music. It was, of course, no surprise to him that his feelings for beauty were less well served by the Roman church than they would have been had he remained an Anglican; he had realized this much at the time of his conversion, when he wrote to his father: "I am surprised you shd. say fancy and aesthetic tastes have led me to my present state of mind: these wd. be better satisfied in the Church of England, for bad taste is always meeting one in the accessories of Catholicism."

Although St. Aloysius's had succeeded St. Ignatius's as the center of Oxford Catholicism, it had not wholly replaced it, for many members of the University and of the old county Catholic families still preferred to attend Mass in familiar surroundings. The congregation of St. Aloysius's, in contrast, was largely composed of Irish servants from North Oxford, itinerant navvies and bargees from the canal beyond Walton Street, and some of the shopkeepers and lodging-house-keepers who were beginning to be received into the Church. It was a dramatic contrast to Hopkins's undergraduate life and his friends of a decade before, who had chiefly been sons of the squirearchy and aristocracy.

Hopkins frequently spoke of how much he liked simple parishioners with no social skills, but the truth was that he seldom found it easy to be at home with persons whose background was much different from his own. A letter he wrote home shows how awkward he felt with the Oxford congregation:

> On Monday evening we had a small parochial concert—the third. Neither voices nor choice of music was very good, still the effect is humanising, as they say. There was some recitation also. It was given by our Young Men's Association: they are shopkeepers and so on, a fine well-mannered set of young men, but their peculiarity and all our congre-

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gation's (excepting the University men and some of the gentry) is that they have a stiff respectful stand-off air which we can scarcely make our way through nor explain, but we believe it to be a growth of a University, where Gown holds itself above and aloof from Town and Town is partly cowed by, partly stands on its dignity against Gown. These young men rally to us, frequent and take parts in our ceremonies, meet a good deal in the parishroom, and so on, but seem as if a joke from us would put them to deep and lasting pain.

The clue to his attitude to social distinctions is surely, in one word, "humanising." Hopkins was regarded by his parishioners with respect, even a guarded affection, but apparently never with familiarity. It would have taken someone more self-confident than he to be completely at ease in an unfamiliar background. Unfortunately, it was probably difficult to warm to the slight, somewhat vehement young priest with an effeminate manner and a disconcerting habit of waving a large red pocket-handkerchief to punctuate his conversation. Those who persevered, however, found him lovable.

The most telling relic of his stay in Oxford is a photograph of the University Catholic Club, taken in the portico of St. Aloysius's. With Hopkins are Father Parkinson, largely and comfortably planted in his chair in the front row, among thirteen undergraduates, their beards, moustaches, and bowlers making them look a good bit older than the clean-shaven Hopkins, who was a decade senior to most of them. But he is removed by a good deal more than age. He stands to one side of the group, his back against a buttress, his eyes turned sideways to the camera, the whole tense angle of his body suggesting his detachment from the others, as if his attention were far away. As usual his expression is reserved, hoodedly enigmatic, and the light that falls prismatically on the planes of his cheeks is a totally exterior illumination, giving nothing away. It is hard to believe that he felt much in common with the men around him.

The official position of both Congregation in Rome and the English hierarchy, which Newman had been unable to budge, was that it was dangerous to their faith and morals for Catholics to attend a heretical university, and their parents were supposed to ask leave in the confessional before sending their sons to Oxford. It was debatable whether the Jesuits themselves were not at least skirting the prohibitions of the hierarchy by encouraging the Catholic Club.

Hopkins never proceeded to the degree of M.A., since Catholics were not eligible to be members of Convocation, which was responsible for the election of M.P.'s for the University, as well as being concerned with University livings in the Church and in the choice of preachers for University Sermons. Unlike many graduates who had already become M.A.'s before conversion, he did not have to remove his name from the books of his college and university. It was clear enough, however, how little welcome Catholics were in Balliol or Oxford.

In spite of the abolition of the religious tests for the University, undergraduates were still required to attend chapel in their colleges, where the services were of course Anglican, although they could be excused from attendance by their own colleges, as Hopkins had been. Occasionally the University proctors would stand at the door of St. Aloysius's, taking the names of undergraduates who went in for Mass. They were considerably more lax, however, about patrolling the little chapel of St. Ignatius in St. Clement's. Some undergraduates who came to Mass were still Anglicans but were tottering on the edge of conversion, but attendance there, at some distance from the University, did not seem so much like a public announcement of their intentions as an appearance at St. Aloysius's. Something of the hostility that the chapel inspired in its neighbors in St. Clement's is indicated by the fact that the Sacrament there had to be locked into an iron safe to keep it from sacrilege.

Much of Hopkins's time in Oxford was spent in St. Ignatius's, an atmosphere far more congenial to him than St. Aloysius's, and there he saw more of undergraduates than he did with Father Parkinson. He saw to the running of the little school at St. Ignatius's and acted as chaplain to the infirmary at the Nazareth House, which took care of small children and the aged. He was also expected to minister to prisoners in the jail.

Another important part of his duty was as chaplain to the 52nd Light Infantry in the Cowley Barracks ("over the hill/There"). It is not easy to imagine Hopkins among soldiers, but he left one important legacy of that period in "The Bugler's First Communion," in which

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he writes tenderly of a young Irish boy who received the Eucharist from Hopkins's hands for the first time, and of his own emotions on that occasion. Hopkins was always moved by innocence, particularly in the young, and still more so when that innocence showed itself in religious observance. It is a subject that must be treated carefully to avoid mawkishness. In this poem his concern that the boy might grow up into less than his promise is so strong that it seems overwrought. Because of its insistence on the bugler boy's "limber liquid youth" and his "mansex fine," the poem is occasionally cited as proof of Hopkins's homosexuality, but it is more convincing as a demonstration of his wince of pain at the prospect of the inevitable corruption of innocence. And it is hardly surprising that, in the Victorian army, corruption should be sexual in nature. There are overtones of strong sexual awareness in the poem, but they are subservient to the theme of the transience of purity.

Like many men leading lives primarily of the mind, Hopkins felt an exaggerated admiration for men of action or those who were much at home in their bodies; it colors such poems as "The Loss of the Eurydice," "Felix Randal," and "Harry Ploughman," as well as "The Bugler's First Communion."

In neither Chesterfield nor Mayfair had Hopkins been charged with the duties of a regular parish priest. In Oxford for the first time he lived the life of the majority of the members of the Society of Jesus, hearing the confessions of the illiterate, visiting the sick, sitting for long hours at the bedsides of the dying, helping to teach in the school at St. Ignatius's, organizing the clubs and guilds and sodalities connected with the church, walking several miles a day back and forth across Magdalen Bridge between St. Aloysius's and St. Ignatius's or on to the barracks or the infirmary. It is the aspect of nineteenth-century Catholic priesthood that evokes the smell of waxed linoleum and oil lamps, straight wooden chairs with slippery leather seats, the prickle of horsehair sofas in tightly closed sitting rooms, and corridors adorned with mass-produced religious statues or oleographs of the Holy Family. Like most of us, Hopkins tended to subscribe to the romantic notion that the life of his poor parishioners was mysteriously more "real" than that of the Fellows of the colleges in Oxford, but the knowledge that Balliol lay only a short distance away, across St. Giles, made him aware of how much his life had changed, how much grace had gone from it in the acceptance of Grace. He was certainly not a snob, but he would have been most un-Victorian if he had failed to see the contrast.

It is small wonder that he sometimes became slightly vehement in asserting his preference for the life of the poor, but his protestations smack of self-preservation rather than hypocrisy, of pain at being excluded. On the whole, he was not successful as a parish priest. According to a fellow Jesuit who has studied his pastoral career, he "was a man who in his shyness felt enormously awkward when he had to perform any public task. His mind and his hand seem to freeze; he begins to worry and fuss, and nervousness seems to consume him before even the most routine public utterance." It is moving today to see the divided nature of his life reflected in the manuscripts of some of his poems from 1878–79, jotted down on the backs of appeals for the needleworkers of St. Aloysius's. Of necessity poetry fitted itself into the cracks of his day and sprouted in his moments of reflection.

Even with heavy parochial duties he was often lonely. A few old friends like Francis de Paravicini looked him up, but his prickly fear of being condescended to probably made him feel less welcome in their houses than he actually was. As an old member of Balliol, he would surely have been welcome in the College, but he seldom, if ever, went there. He saw something of the Master, Benjamin Jowett, but the years had not warmed their cool feelings for each other.

Another Fellow of Balliol he saw occasionally was T. H. Green, whom Hopkins as an undergraduate had found "of a rather offensive style of infidelity." He called on him at least once: "I wish I had made more of the opportunities I had of seeing him in my 10 months at Oxford," he wrote regretfully some years later, "for he lived close by." It was a relationship doomed by ideas rather than personality. "I never had his intimacy," Green said of Hopkins, "but always liked him very much." But it was hard for him to convey a personal affection when he so disliked everything that Hopkins's Church stood for:

> It vexes me to the heart to think of a fine nature being victimised by a system which in my "historic

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conscience" I hold to be subversive of the Family and the State, and which puts the service of an exceptional institution, or the saving of the individual soul, in opposition to loyal service to society.

Hopkins had never totally lost touch with Walter Pater, and he had been pleased to hear, only a year before he returned to Oxford, that Pater remembered him vividly and continued an interest in him. In the decade intervening since Hopkins was an undergraduate, Pater had become something of an Oxford star because of his *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* with its famous—or scandalous, according to one's view—conclusion, invoking the authority of aesthetic experience as a guide to life and exhorting the reader to burn with a hard gem-like flame. Pater was one of the first of former friends whom he met on his return, and it was heartening to find that one of the best-known men in Oxford greeted him with pleasure. At least two or three dinners together followed for the two men, and possibly a few of the long peripatetic conversations they had engaged in when Hopkins was an undergraduate. But there was obviously no time for him to see much more of his old tutor, and his statement after he left Oxford that "Pater was one of the men I saw most of" did not necessarily mean that they had often been together.

The sad truth was that Hopkins was largely cut off from his roots, a stranger to those with whom he had more in common in background than he had with his own order and church. Oxford, which he had once claimed in a burst of undergraduate exuberance as "my park, my pleasaunce," had become a private garden in which he feared to trespass. He was often in a black mood, he told the de Paravicinis, one in which his chief consolation was "not only the literal sun but nature and the many things which make Oxford attractive."

Hopkins was, of course, in the habit of turning for consolation to nature, just as he turned to God, of whom nature was a mirror, and he had the additional solace of writing poetry. At Oxford he experienced a burst of poetic energy that was second only to his great outpouring at St. Beuno's, but its changed nature serves to indicate the differences in mood he felt in Wales and in Oxford. In such a poem as "God's Grandeur," written at St. Beuno's in Wales, nature is infinitely renewable, backed by a kind of Maker's guarantee from the third Person of the Trinity, "the Holy Ghost [who] over the bent / World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings." In Oxford the moral corruption he fears for the bugler boy is paralleled by the physical decay of the beauty of town and countryside.

In, for example, "Duns Scotus's Oxford," his magnificent tribute to the thirteenth-century philosopher "who of all men most sways my spirits to peace," he writes of the souring decay of the gray beauty of the

> Towery city and branchy between towers;
> Cuckoo-echoing, bell-swarmèd, lark-charmèd,
> rook-racked, river-rounded . . .

It was difficult to keep in mind that the "base and brickish skirt" of nineteenth-century suburbs had not wholly canceled the memory of Duns Scotus himself, who in this poem takes on something of the shy and fugitive symbolic meaning of an uncorrupted past that the Scholar-Gipsy had for Matthew Arnold.

It is indicative of the change of mood between St. Beuno's and Oxford that at the former most of his poems are written with the speaker literally looking upward, at the morning in "God's Grandeur," at "The Starlight Night," at the "glassy peartree" of "Spring," at "The Sea and the Skylark," at the "silk-sack clouds" of "Hurrahing in Harvest," or probably most evocative of all, at the bird hovering in "the big wind," "The Windhover." By comparison the poems written in 1878–79 in Oxford seem earth-bound, tethered to a decaying planet.

One poem that clearly shows his mood in Oxford is "Binsey Poplars," written in March 1879, at the end of a punishingly cold winter, when "the great expanse of Port Meadow was covered over" by the flooding Thames and crowded with skaters. Hopkins was not the man to be pent up indoors by rough weather or kept by it from going along the river banks to his beloved village of Binsey, where he had often gone as an undergraduate to visit the holy well at the remote parish church or to walk under the great double row of aspens hanging over the towpath at a spot where the bells of the city and the hoot of the railway receded into imperceptibility. Across the river lay the ruins of Godstow Nunnery, where the Fair Rosamund had been buried in the twelfth century.

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On the twelfth of March he came back from his wintry walk in a state of shock and added a stark postscript to an unfinished letter: "I have been up to Godstow this afternoon. I am sorry to say that the aspens that lined the river are everyone felled." In sorrow he wrote his lament for

> My aspens dear, whose airy cages quelled,
> Quelled or quenched in leaves the leaping sun . . .

His grief was for both his own lost youth and the beauty of nature that could never be seen again:

> After-comers cannot guess the beauty been.
> Ten or twelve, only ten or twelve
> Strokes of havoc únselve
> The sweet especial scene,
> Rural scene, a rural scene,
> Sweet especial rural scene.

To make the loss even more poignant, the trees had been cut down to provide brake linings for the locomotives of the Great Western Railway, which had for years seemed to Hopkins a symbol of the victory of creeping industrialism over the innocence of the physical world.

A month after the felling of the trees Hopkins was convinced that he would not "expect to be long at Oxford. I shd. like however to see the Spring out." In fact, he stayed on in Oxford until the following October, but he no longer had any reason to believe that his return to the place he so loved was to mark a resurgence of his happiness as an undergraduate or that it pointed the way to his success as a priest.

Six months later, writing to an old friend from Liverpool, a place he disliked intensely, Hopkins reflected upon his Oxford stay:

> Not to love my University would be to undo the very buttons of my being and as for the Oxford townspeople I found them in my 10 months' stay among them very deserving of affection—though somewhat stiff, stand-off, and depressed. And in that stay I saw very little of the University. But I could not but feel how alien it was, how chilling, and deeply to be distrusted.

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A Lonely Passion for the "Liberal Imagination"

SAM TANENHAUS

I was seventeen, a high-school senior inflamed with literature, which I'd discovered the year before. Literature meant poetry (T. S. Eliot), stories (Hemingway), and, especially, novels (Dostoyevsky). I knew there was such a thing as criticism, but I had no idea why anyone would read it, much less write it. Wasn't it something college professors published to hold on to their jobs? I had heard of Lionel Trilling. He was responsible for *The Experience of Literature*, a giant anthology that my mother, a ravenous reader, studied at night and quoted at the breakfast table. This book was also a favorite of my Advanced Placement English teacher, who often read aloud from it in class. The commentary on *King Lear* had made an impression on me. I liked the sound of Trilling's prose, suave but uninsistent. Better yet, I liked his name. Literature seemed a community of great names, and *Lionel Trilling*—magisterial yet unmistakably Jewish—sounded right. So I removed a small, drab paperback from the living-room bookcase—*The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society*—and began reading.

The first essay flew over my head. It was painstakingly subtle and obscurely argumentative. Reading it was like eavesdropping on a debate between Thomists. To understand it you had to know things I didn't. Here and there I lit upon a glittering sentence, but elsewhere I wilted under Trilling's intellectual demands. Luckily there were easier pieces, such as the one on F. Scott Fitzgerald, my hero at this time. I had read all of his novels (even *The Beautiful and Damned*) and most of his stories. I knew something about his life, and, like so many adolescents, I grieved for his sad, cruel fate. To die penniless and forgotten and then, posthumously, ascend to permanent bestsellerdom. What irony, what tragedy, what a rebuke to the ignorant public! Trilling placed Fitzgerald in the company of Goethe, Byron, and Shaw:

> I am aware that I have involved Fitzgerald with a great many great names and that it might be felt by some that this can do him no service, the disproportion being so large. But the disproportion will seem large only to those who think of Fitzgerald chiefly through his early public legend of heedlessness. Those who have a clear recollection of his mature work or who have read *The Crack-Up* will at least not think of the disproportion as one of kind. Fitzgerald himself did not, and it is by a man's estimation of himself that we must begin to estimate him.

Those last clauses made me shiver. I quoted them the following summer in a letter to, of all people, Hank Aaron, who was closing in on Babe Ruth's home-run record and receiving racist hate mail for his trouble. Aaron's reply came weeks later. With fans like me in his corner, he wrote (or someone wrote—his signature had a suspiciously feminine slant), his momentous task was lightened. He didn't mention the literary reference, my very first.

In this essay that moved me to quotation, Trilling spoke up for Fitzgerald's most enigmatic protagonist. "Gatsby is said by some to be not quite credible, but the question of the literal credibility he may or may not have becomes trivial before the large significance he implies. For Gatsby, divided between power and dream, comes inevitably to stand

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for America itself." *America itself.* This wasn't "analysis." This was exaltation. Thus I learned that criticism was a form of love.

But it was love founded, in part, on anger. Even to me, at age seventeen, it was clear that there were opponents whom Trilling was gently taking on, people who disputed his belief that Fitzgerald "consciously placed himself in the line of the great" or who thought the cover boy of American Lit. had no business doing this. I knew next to nothing about the climate in which Trilling had written "F. Scott Fitzgerald" and the fifteen other essays in *The Liberal Imagination.* I was dimly aware that there had been a rash of "proletarian" novels in the 1930s and that Fitzgerald had lost admirers when he didn't slip sandwich boards over his shoulders, but I was unschooled in the bitter political quarrels that had divided New York intellectuals in the 1930s and 1940s. For me it was enough that Trilling came to the defense of my favorite writer against the scorn of the mob.

I took my parents' copy of *The Liberal Imagination* to college. This was in the early 1970s. Campus protests had quieted, and students reluctantly filed back into the classroom as Vietnam wound down, Watergate unraveled the Nixon administration, and the oil crisis concluded the extended party of the sixties. The Youth Movement had nowhere to go, but few wanted it to end. It had been so heady, so glamorous. A few slogans remained. Select words gained a kind of talismanic power. One such word was *relevance.* Its syllables have since subsided into neutrality, but to my college generation they were an honorific, a rallying cry, above all a test unflinchingly applied to every author and every book. The result was a curious, even perverse, reshuffling of the literary deck. Tolkien was relevant. So was Dalton Trumbo *(Johnny Got His Gun).* But my gods usually flunked. Still, I stood up for them in late-night arguments lubricated with beer and sweetened with marijuana. I was a poor debater, shrill, elitist. "Your problem," one kindly adversary explained, "is that you don't care about people." Instead I cared about Joyce, Keats, and Flaubert, whose portraits I Scotch-taped to the wall above my desk. Not one of them had demonstrably eased the lot of starving Biafrans, but I tried to prove they could and wound up a deserving loser.

After one drubbing I repaired to *The Liberal Imagination* and began, out of some obscure instinct, to read "Reality in America," the essay that had daunted me in high school. It didn't seem so difficult now. In fact, its measured, circumspect phrases advanced the argument I'd been struggling to make. "Reality in America," like Trilling's piece on Fitzgerald, is also in part a defense, this time of that heedless master of irrelevance, Henry James, who had taken many knocks from the literary establishment. "By liberal critics," Trilling wrote in 1946, "James is traditionally put to the ultimate question: of what use, of what actual political use, are his gifts and their intention? . . . of what possible practical value in our world of impending disaster can James's work be?" Precious little, by most accounts. But the fault, Trilling averred, lay not with James but with "the American metaphysic," which holds that "reality is always material reality, hard, resistant, unformed, impenetrable, and unpleasant."

The test of relevance, in sum, wasn't new. It hadn't even undergone revision, for in Trilling's day, as in mine, the examiners themselves seemed ensconced in privilege. It was a safe bet that in their own lives James's detractors seldom had been socked in the eye by the bare-knuckled world they expected to meet in fiction. The same held for my generation: What did any of us know about the impoverished masses, so superior to ourselves and so comfortably out of view? The true topic of our debate was ourselves, our easy ride, our guilt. Awarded a furlough from what we called "the real world," we craved, at least in books and in the classroom, a salvific glimpse of "material reality, hard, resistant, unformed, impenetrable, and unpleasant." Whomever Trilling meant by liberals hadn't changed much in thirty years.

Was Trilling then afraid of "material reality"? Was he imprisoned in his ivory tower? It didn't appear so to me. He seemed well versed in the liberal social agenda; he even endorsed it. But, like me (I now chose to think), he felt bullied by the spotless paladins of relevance, so fixed in their ideals, so ruthless in their pursuit of virtue. Yet, if the social good was to be won at any cost, shouldn't we try to guess what that cost might be? For, as Trilling wrote:

> When we approach liberalism in a critical spirit, we shall fail in critical completeness if we do not take

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into account the value and necessity of its organizational impulse. But at the same time we must understand that organization means delegation, and agencies, and bureaus, and technicians, and that the ideas that can survive delegation, that can be passed on to agencies and bureaus, and technicians, incline to be ideas of a certain kind and of a certain simplicity: they give up something of their largeness and modulation in order to survive.

This remark was aimed at the intellectuals of Trilling's own day, many of whom were reluctant to abandon their faith in the Soviet Union despite the purges and labor camps, despite Stalin's sweetheart deal with Nazi Germany. This meant nothing to me. The only politics I knew was the politics of Vietnam, of the civil rights movement, and, though it was not yet in full bloom, of feminism. My views differed little from those of my friends, but I wasn't as ready as they were to leap into the perfected future, especially if it meant, as it evidently did, erasing the past, for the past included the writers who had become my obsession and who now faced extinction because they were—I still wince at the word—irrelevant. I found myself in an odd position: I accepted liberal doctrine but I felt uneasy about the mentality that went with it. The distinction seemed disingenuous, or at any rate impossible to explain.

Trilling became my ally. There was no one else to turn to. You could learn from R. P. Blackmur and Allen Tate; but they wrote for people who *liked* Henry James. They hadn't reckoned on relevance. Trilling, though, had picked out its distant gleam on the darkling plain of the 1940s, had felt the stampeding rush of the future. And he wanted to slow it down. Even the titles of some of his essays—"The Sense of the Past," "Manners, Morals, and the Novel"—sounded a plaintive note. Plaintive but not nostalgic (nostalgia was too easy). "The refinement of our historical sense," as he put it, "chiefly means that we keep it properly complicated." I read Trilling's other books—*Matthew Arnold, E. M. Forster, The Middle of the Journey, The Opposing Self, Beyond Culture, Sincerity and Authenticity.* I liked them all. Some were probably better than *The Liberal Imagination.* But it remained my book of truths. I turned its pages so often they came unglued. I kept them intact with a rubber band. It was a lonely passion. None of my literary friends had read *The Liberal Imagination* or anything else by Trilling.

Then, in November 1975, he died. His obituary made the front page of the *New York Times.* Tributes came from all quarters. I, too, wanted to pay homage. No one understood him as well as I, who had stood shoulder to shoulder with him at the campus pub fending off the philistines, who had silently declaimed his phrases on long solitary walks. One of my instructors agreed to supervise my "independent" on Trilling. I slaved on it for a semester. "Well," said my instructor when he handed it back, "you certainly got Trilling down." Not long ago I happened upon this opus of my student years. In the few places where it is intelligible, it manages, at best, a numbing pastiche of Trilling's own prose, filled with diffident qualifying clauses and unexplained references to "culture."

At the time, though, I was proud of the essay and sent mimeographed copies off with my graduate school applications. Trilling had pointed me toward the Romantics, and Yale was the place to study them. I arrived there in the fall of 1977. My colleagues were all bright and well read—burgeoning scholars, joyously bookish. They seemed deaf to catcalls about relevance, and they liked criticism. In fact, their conversation was peppered with the names of critics, whom they called "theorists": Barthes, Bloom, Derrida, de Man. But no one mentioned Trilling. Or almost no one. A student one year ahead of me had conversed with the great man himself at Columbia. "He spoke in a phony English accent," this twenty-three-year-old confided, plunging a blade into my heart. "But he pulled it off. When he said *vulgar,* he sounded like he meant it." My adviser, an authority on the Victorians, had written a book on Matthew Arnold. Trilling's name was listed in the index. Now I could get somewhere. "Did you ever meet Trilling?" I asked at our first meeting. "Several times." He looked puzzled. "Why do you ask? Did you study with him?" No, but . . . but what? What was there to say? To him Trilling was just another very good critic—and the academy was bulging with them. My friends took pity; they notified me on the rare occasions when Trilling's name came up in their seminars. One professor, a dashing young man in his late twenties, recommended Trilling's essay on *The Princess Casamassima,* a cornerstone of *The Liberal Imagination.* It was an

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old-fashioned piece of work, this professor conceded, but wasn't it a shame no one wrote that way anymore?

Trilling, I realized, was passé. Worse, he was—no other word—irrelevant, but in a new and ghastly way. No longer too rarefied, he now wasn't rarefied enough. He said nothing about "discourse" or "intertextuality"; he used outmoded phrases like "moral imagination"; he was hung up on yesterday's politics. Of course, no one came right out and stated this. There were no great debates in graduate school. If I mentioned Trilling, there was a polite show of interest, as if I'd brought up Van Wyck Brooks or Irving Babbitt or some other figment of yesterday's belles lettres. To each his own hobbyhorse; mine was the gentleman critic who muttered about "vulgarity." There was no place for Trilling at Yale and, as I quickly saw, no place for me.

I lasted out the year, barely, then went, like so many failed graduate students, to New York where I worked in publishing houses, some prestigious, some seedy. I answered phones, photocopied manuscripts, mailed review copies, and "tried to write." I still owned *The Liberal Imagination*. Now and again, I flipped through its loosened pages but without patience, let alone the old fervor. Trilling's prose seemed archaic and mannered, like the unconscious parody I'd written as a college junior. Besides, I was up to my ears in "the real world," as *writers*—unlike mere critics—always had been. Life was dingy apartments, unapproachable women, exacting bosses, panic attacks on the subway.

Then an editor friend, getting ahead and watching me struggle, made a gallant offer. He proposed that I write a primer for a book club he administered that reissued "classics" in fancy fake-leather covers. The classics included *Gone With the Wind*, *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, and an expurgated edition of *Madame Bovary*. I was allowed more latitude than Flaubert had been: I could say what I wished. By now, I'd had my fill of the real world. I practically dived back into the stacks. I consulted authoritative-looking volumes. I remember one by Burton Rascoe, another by Mortimer Adler. I studied lists of the one hundred greatest writers, the one thousand greatest books. Why, I'd hardly read anything. What could I say about literature when I hadn't read Polybius, Ariosto, George Meredith? I brushed up on critics, turning back the clock to Matthew Arnold, to Shelley, to Coleridge, to Samuel Johnson, to Longinus, then winding it forward to Edmund Wilson, Northrop Frye, Kenneth Burke.

My contract called for an outline. I submitted one that satisfied the editor; but he needed the approval of his superior, the editor-in-chief. She had reservations. One especially galled me. I had proposed a section on literary criticism. "No more than two pages," was her comment, written in the margin. The old debater in me sprang up, ready to remount the soapbox. But something held me back, perhaps those hours kneeling at the copying machine, pulling crumpled sheets out of its inky innards. I tried to rethink the matter from the editor-in-chief's point of view. This was a book for grown-ups, who held jobs and raised families, and now—moved by that blameless impulse, curiosity—hoped to spackle a few gaps in their learning. Formal criticism was not to the point; what these readers craved, in all likelihood, was reassurance, familiarity. They would best be served by a primer that dealt with literature not as an alien discipline but as an adjunct to their own experience. A remark, half-remembered, floated out of the past: "Literature is the human activity that takes the fullest and most precise account of variousness, possibility, complexity, and difficulty."

Those words conclude the preface to *The Liberal Imagination*. I pulled off the rubber bands and read the book straight through, something I'd never done before. I read past the dialectical hairsplitting, past the cultural politics. I rediscovered the tenderness that had moved me at age seventeen when every new book seemed a continent as fresh as the "green breast" that adorned the last page of *Gatsby*. I now knew I could never write *The Liberal Imagination* or anything remotely like it, but I could at least pledge myself to its votive spirit. Ten years before, Trilling had taught me that criticism was love. At last I had absorbed the lesson.

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André Gide and the Homosexual Debate

JOHN WEIGHTMAN

My starting point is a query put to me by an editor:

> André Gide . . . seems from here [in America], rather small and beside the point. Is that how it looks from where you are? . . . Odd, with homosexuality now something like a small political movement, one would have thought much more would have been made of Gide, who very early uncloseted himself.

Gide does seem by now, some forty years after his death, a relatively forgotten figure, although there is still, of course, a Gidian academic industry. During the second half of his long career, he was the best known of all contemporary French writers. As the house genius of *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, he was at the center of French literary life, and he was also widely known throughout Europe, as was confirmed by his being awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1947. Although he always claimed to be primarily an artist, he had a flair for stirring up controversy on the three main subjects of general human interest outside sports—religion, sex, and politics. Gide had grown up as a fervent Protestant, and it took him a long time, and much heart searching, to work his way through to agnosticism. He was a married man who eventually felt an obligation to proclaim his homosexuality. After being largely indifferent to politics in his earlier years, he became a prominent anti-colonialist, as a consequence of a trip to the Congo. When the Nazi threat loomed, he threw in his lot with the Communists, but only to recant almost immediately, after a visit to the Soviet Union enlightened him about the shortcomings of Stalinism.

Gide's very topicality, as a writer involved in so many contemporary issues, meant that once he was dead and circumstances began to change, his celebrity would inevitably begin to wane—at least until the emergence of some consensus about the quality, durable or otherwise, of his literary works. My feeling is that such a consensus has not yet been arrived at.

As regards the sexual issue, it has to be emphasized that, in his day, Gide was seen as a general liberator rather than as a specialist defender of homosexual rights. When I was a student in France before the war, he was very popular with most young people, who read his little book *Les Nourritures terrestres* as a sort of pagan New Testament calling on them to revolt against the religious and moral conventions of French bourgeois society, and to achieve the fullest possible expression of their individual temperaments. The students I knew didn't pay much attention to Gide's homosexuality; that was just a personal quirk that he was entitled to indulge in, if he felt so inclined. What interested them was the slogan *"Familles, je vous hais"* and the general thrill of liberation from the stuffiness of French conformism. Gide preached spontaneity, nakedness in the sun, appreciation of the joys of the moment, and exposure to exotic cultural influences beyond the borders of France.

It seemed to me that he was doing for the French what, in their different ways, G. B. Shaw, H. G. Wells, and especially D. H. Lawrence had done for the English. If he appeared rather more subtle and elegant than the English writers, this was because he couldn't help being, in himself, an exquisite product of the high bourgeois culture he was

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subverting, not to mention his quixotic charm as a rentier prepared to saw off the branch he was sitting on. I respected his attempt at honesty; I thought his influence to be all for the good, provided some of his suggestions were not taken too literally, but my northern working-class cynicism made me doubt whether he could have been so lyrically "free," and so willing to trust nature rather than culture, had he not been permanently cushioned by a private income, which is a cultural not a natural circumstance. To do Gide justice, he eventually realized this himself, as can be seen from some late diary entries, but by then his philosophy, such as it is, had been fully elaborated, and it was left to non-rentiers to figure out for themselves how far they could live by it in the workaday world.

Not only was Gide thought of primarily as a general liberator, none of his enthusiastic readers, so far as I know, ever espoused his homosexual cause. In any case, he launched it rather late in life; he was already fifty-three when he took the bold step of publishing *Corydon*, his theoretical defense of homosexuality, and fifty-six when he admitted his own involvement in his autobiography, *Si le grain ne meurt*. The opposition, understandably, was fierce; he was at once condemned by orthodox Catholics, and cold-shouldered by other contemporaries. There is a famous anecdote about Paul Claudel, who had hoped to convert him from Protestantism to Catholicism, pointing one mealtime to a pan in which something was being flambéed, and proclaiming: "That is how Gide will sizzle in Hell!" Gide's homosexual friends showed no eagerness to risk public obloquy, while the heterosexual ones tended to turn a blind eye to his deviance, although some of them deplored it in private. One friend whom I met after the war had been careful to keep his son out of reach of Gide's attentions. Another told me it was rather a strain accompanying the great man to the cinema, because he would keep changing his seat to sidle up to some promising youth glimpsed in the shadows. This was said with a rueful smile, as if Gide's elderly promiscuity were an embarrassing, but forgivable, weakness.

No doubt, Gide's frankness encouraged a later generation of French writers—Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Michel Tournier, Mathieu Galley, and others—to accept their homosexuality more willingly than they might otherwise have done, but either through discretion or a lack of conviction, none of them has written as explicitly in his own defense as Gide did. Nor has any of them discussed Gide's apologia at any length. All in all, Gide, in spite of his liberating influence, has not been the homosexual beacon one might have expected.

The first and most obvious reason for this is that what he practiced and advocated was pederasty. This is different in kind from the equal partnership between consenting adults, which I take to be the dominant, militant form of male homosexuality at the present time. There is no suggestion anywhere in Gide's writings that he ever had a sexual relationship with a person of his own age, apart from some hanky-panky under the dining room table with the concierge's son, when they were both toddlers. His first experiences were with Arab adolescents or pre-adolescents in North Africa, as he explains in his autobiography. He was in his early twenties at the time, and in a state of heightened sensibility because of incipient tuberculosis. With his friend, Paul Laurens, he was sharing the favors of a female prostitute, when he discovered that he derived more sensual and lyrical satisfaction from consorting with an Arab boy, who offered his services. What these services were exactly is not explained. Gide mentions incidentally that he had a horror of sodomy, and he frequently states that he is not an "invert," but without defining the term. Since he also says that he could prolong the ecstasy on his own, after his Arab partner had left him, one must suppose that his idea of sexual bliss was some form of mutual or simultaneous masturbation.

Although he had favorites among the Arab boys, their identities were not important, since they were interchangeable; this fits in with his repeated assertion that he felt love for his wife, but only desire for boys. His diary shows that he later went on to find sexual satisfaction in many other places besides Africa: Italy, Corsica, Paris, Marseille, and so forth. He admits somewhere that one of the reasons why he could never settle for any length of time at Cuverville, the country house in Normandy where his wife lived, was the difficulty of finding opportunities for sex in an area where he was well known. Indeed,

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a constant theme in his diary is the need to get away from Cuverville; he must have been one of the most peripatetic of all modern authors, and certainly the one who lived least often in his own home. His comments on his roving sex life vary, and are not always as lyrical as the account of his first experiences, given in the autobiography. Sometimes his chief feeling is one of relief at being purged of desire, so that he can turn his mind to other things. Occasionally, he expresses revulsion at the indignity of looking for satisfaction in the back streets of big cities, and wishes that he had not got used to the nomadic life, which is difficult to reconcile with steady concentration on literary work.

But one important moral point that he never mentions anywhere, so far as I can discover, is that most, if not all, of these casual encounters must have been based on payment. His sex life presumably depended for a large part on prostitution, and on what would legally count, at least in Europe, as corruption of minors, even if the minors in question were willing to oblige. Perhaps Gide just took it for granted that such prostitution was innocent, if it suited both parties, or perhaps he was concentrating so single-mindedly on his own pleasure that he remained oblivious of the moral issue as it concerned the boy prostitutes. Apparently, his behavior never got him into trouble in France, where in any case *la police des moeurs* is chary of pursuing eminent literary figures, but the fact remains that the morality of adolescent prostitution is an issue that the advocates of this kind of homosexuality should logically consider. Also, while Gide's pederasty may never have crossed the border into pedophilia, the dividing line between the two practices is probably uncertain, and therefore needs to be discussed. Whether Gide's conscience was absolutely clear on this point remains an open question; the diary contains many curious references to his being egged on by the Devil, but whether these are genuine twinges of remorse or just ironical asides to himself, it is impossible to say; they may not even be connected with the sexual issue.

When he published *Corydon* in 1924, after years of cogitation and—he says—against the advice of his friends, it found no ardent supporters, and it has never been one of his widely discussed texts. The explanation may be that it was immediately overshadowed by *Si le grain ne meurt*, which tells his personal story in the most limpid, classical way, without any intrusion of theoretical considerations. Although he always claimed that the value of *Corydon* would eventually be recognized, it still strikes me today as a muddled, unevenly argued little book.

Since as a homosexual he had not yet "come out," it is not a direct statement; it takes the form of a dialogue, in which a sniffy, carping narrator is asking a self-confessed pederast, Corydon, to justify his proclivities. From the start, Corydon is naively presented as a distinguished figure, greatly superior to his interlocutor in manner, intelligence, and knowledge. His first response is to describe how he discovered his homosexuality. He was engaged to be married to a girl whom he loved so deeply that she inspired him with no thoughts of carnality (a reference to Gide's own frequently expressed spiritual attachment to Madeleine Rondeau, the cousin who became his wife). In spite of some disturbing intimations, Corydon assumed that his indifference to other women was a sign of his chaste devotion to his fiancée. Then, during his courtship, he noticed that his betrothed's young brother, Alexis, was becoming increasingly attached to him. Eventually, Alexis made open advances; Corydon spurned them indignantly as being effeminate, and urged Alexis to seek salvation in the love of a good woman. But Alexis, after giving final expression to his feelings in a letter, committed suicide, thus revealing to Corydon both the authenticity of homoerotic emotion and his own latent tendencies. Corydon broke off his engagement and decided to devote himself to proving to other homosexuals, like Alexis had done, that what they may feel ashamed of as an anomaly is, in fact, an innocent, natural appetite that has always existed. (We are not told how the lady concerned reacted to these events and views; only that she later died, while still young.)

This little fiction seems to be a romantic transposition of Gide's first encounter with the Arab boy. It is a fact, attested by various sources, that in all sexual relationships an adult may be enticed into involvement by a precocious child or adolescent. But it still remains to be shown in what sense homosexuality is "natural."

The simple answer that Corydon gives in

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the first place is, as might be expected, that no human tendency can be outside Nature; Nature, taken in the widest sense, is just that which is. Corydon adds, oddly enough, that the only unnatural thing he recognizes is the work of art. This seems illogical because, if it is in man's nature to produce art, then art itself is only an extension of human nature, and its supposed artificiality is just Nature at one remove. However, be that as it may, I am not sure that Corydon, or Gide, ever sees clearly that Nature is useless as a moral criterion, since a homicidal maniac could equally well invoke it to justify his undoubtedly inherent impulses. In the eighteenth century, when the idea of Nature was at its most fashionable, the Marquis de Sade did precisely this; he stood the Rousseauistic concept of "good" Nature on its head, and argued with mad conviction that strong individuals have a right, or even a duty, to work out their aggressive natures to the full, particularly as regards sex. Gide is not one of the hysterical modern admirers of Sade, but, as I shall argue later, he has some neo-Sadian or neo-Nietzschean features that complicate his attempt to extend the range of "virtuous" Nature, without going so far as to abolish morality altogether.

Next, Corydon proceeds to emphasize the complexities of sexuality in the vegetable and animal kingdoms. This is a vast and complicated subject that he summarizes very rapidly with the obvious intention of destroying the illusion that there is any neat arrangement in Nature for the sure conjunction of man and woman. The division into sexes is not universal, and where it exists it takes innumerable forms. Basically, however, the female is the essential partner, who ensures the continuity of the race; the male, who evolved to supply genetic variety, is an addition, a sport, even a luxury. (One might have thought that Gide/Corydon, who was so well versed in the Bible, would have pointed out that this is a striking reversal of the Adam's rib story, which derives the female from the male, but he doesn't do so.)

Secondly, Corydon says, the sexual instinct is not focused primarily on reproduction. The initial prompting is towards pleasure, and procreation is a by-product. Because the sexual process is such a hit-or-miss affair, Nature over-insures by supplying more eggs and far more male seed than is technically necessary. The notion that there is any simple balance between male and female, either in the animal species or in the human race, has, according to Corydon, to be abandoned. In addition to the supposedly "normal" couple, all sorts of intermediary states or expedients can be found. Homosexuality is one of them; it has always existed, not only among humans but also among some animals, even when the opportunity for heterosexual behavior is present. (Incidentally, if there is no reliable balance in Nature, this means that Papageno's charming aria in *The Magic Flute*, "Ein Mann, ein Weib, ein Weib, ein Mann" is not expressing a simple, natural truth, as one might suppose, but a secondary, socially conditioned aspiration or idealization.)

This first zoological part of the thesis boils down to saying that homosexuality is a recurrent phenomenon in the jumbled, wasteful processes of Nature, and just has to be accepted in the first place as one of the given mysteries. This is no doubt very true, but, as I have already suggested, the same can be said initially about all human tendencies of whatever kind, including those of "inverts," a term that Corydon/Gide always uses disparagingly. Morality only begins at the point when a particular society chooses between the various promptings of Nature, favoring some and suppressing others, in the supposed interest of the general good.

As it happens, Gide formulates Corydon's naturalistic claim more bluntly in a short diary entry: "In the name of what God or what ideal do you forbid me to live according to my nature?" If the Marquis de Sade had put this question, the humanistic answer would have been: "God doesn't come into it. It is antisocial to torture prostitutes, even if your nature urges you to do so." Homosexuality is not so clear a case, since it does not necessarily involve physical persecution of the other partner. But if Nature is as indefinite as Gide says, pederasty may be infectious or habit-forming, with debatable consequences for the good of society or the happiness of the individual. Contemporary European society has, on the whole, moved to the position of recognizing homosexual relations between consenting adults as an innocent fulfillment of their nature, but there is still a question mark against pederasty, as against pedophilia. How is Corydon going to deal with this?

He prefaces his consideration of the social aspect of the problem by repeating the point

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about desire not being primarily geared to reproduction. He presents sexual arousal, in the first place, as a sort of extension of universal narcissism: "I believe, excuse my boldness, that in both sexes homosexuality is more spontaneous, more naive than heterosexuality." Heterosexual activity, he says, has almost to be learned; witness the legend of Daphnis and Chloe, in which the young man cannot perform properly until he has been initiated by an older woman. No wonder, then, that in certain periods of civilization, and particularly in ancient Greece, pederasty was considered at least as normal an outlet for the superfluity of male desire as heterosexuality, and was regulated accordingly. Also, given that the male principle represents sport and luxury in Nature, it is not surprising that homosexuality should have been especially present in times of great artistic production, such as the Renaissance in Florence or the Shakespearian age in England. Corydon does not ask himself whether Florentine or Shakespearian homosexuality was of the adult kind or not. He just assumes that pederasty is the dominant form of the deviance and, warming to his theme, argues that a bisexual society, on the model of ancient Greece, is preferable to the officially heterosexual society of Western Europe, where young men are exposed to the dangers of female prostitution, of vulgar company, and disease:

> I think that a friend, even in the most Greek sense of the word, is more advisable for an adolescent than a female lover. . . . I maintain that peace in the home, family respectability and the health of husband and wife were more securely preserved by Greek sexual mores than they are by ours. [He was writing, of course, at a time when syphilis was still the sexual plague, not AIDS.]

Under the Greek system, Corydon explains, young men were subject to the civilizing influence of an older male lover roughly from the ages of thirteen to twenty-three, and then graduated to marriage and procreation. He doesn't explain what happened after that: were most grown men permanently converted to heterosexuality or, while founding a family, did they repeat the cycle by taking a young lover on the side? Nor does Corydon tell us what the women thought of this, particularly the young girls, deprived of their male contemporaries between the ages of thirteen and twenty-three. It makes one reflect that Socrates' Xanthippe may have had a good feminist reason for being a shrew. And, while Corydon accords the female the honor of being the guarantor of the species, this does not prevent him from expressing himself as an unconscious male chauvinist, and he makes some strange remarks about both women and young men:

> If the adolescent falls into the hands of a woman, this may spell disaster for him: alas! There are only too many examples of this. But since, at such a tender age, an adolescent can only be a fairly mediocre lover, it is fortunately unnatural that a woman should fall in love with him.

First, this statement is at variance with the helpful role played by the mature lady in the Daphnis and Chloe legend. Second, it is an odd opinion to have been penned by Gide, a great admirer of Racine, whose *Phèdre* is all about the fierce, naturally "unnatural," passion of an older woman for an adolescent (unless, of course, Racine was a closet queen, and Phaedra a male lover in disguise; but neither Gide, nor anyone else, so far as I know, has ever suggested this). Third, if an adolescent is a mediocre lover with a woman, in what sense can he be a satisfactory one with a man, unless the younger partner is expected to play no more than a totally passive role?

This second part of *Corydon* is so open to criticism that one can easily understand why the book has had little influence. There may well be a valid case for pederasty, or at least for extending freedom of sexual choice to all individuals from puberty onwards, but Gide doesn't make it adequately. Corydon's idealized picture of Greek sexuality is not altogether borne out by such specialist studies as those of J. K. Dover, and in any case it disregards the historical change in the status of women. It goes far beyond the usual claim of modern homosexuals that they are a minority, entitled to the same rights as the heterosexual majority. And even if we accept that Gide may have been reacting to the defects and hypocrisies of late-nineteenth-century society, it seems incredible that he should advocate the segregation of boys and girls at a time when their sexual drive is at its strongest, and a fair proportion of them mate for life. Perhaps he was tempted to be provocative and paradoxical since he was hiding behind the persona of

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Corydon. Even so, the book remains very unsatisfactory—surprisingly so, given André Gide's general ability.

In his direct confessional writings, such as *Si le grain ne meurt* and the diary, Gide is predominantly descriptive, not propagandist, and the picture he gives of his sex life puts him into a very special, and probably numerically limited, category of pederasts. His main peculiarity was not, as it happened, his interest in boys, but the fact that he combined this interest with the platonic adoration of his cousin, Madeleine, whom he had known since childhood and had always assumed he would marry. The chaste, semi-religious fixation on an idealized female figure—it might be called "the Beatrice Complex"—is a variety of neo-courtly love that occurs in the makeup of a number of other late-nineteenth-century French authors, notably Paul Claudel and Alain-Fournier, neither of whom, however, was homosexual. In Gide's case, it was particularly strong and coincided with his early religious fervor. One may wonder to what extent, if any, he saw the young Madeleine as a real woman of flesh and blood; he writes about her as if she were part religious icon, and part non-sexual mother substitute.

After his first homosexual experiences, he consulted a doctor, who assured him that marriage would cure him of such tendencies. He had to press Madeleine to accept him (why she hesitated is not made clear), but she eventually did so shortly after his mother's death. Sexually, the marriage was a failure from the start. He doesn't say whether he actually tried to consummate it, but in the extraordinary confession he wrote after Madeleine's death, *Et nunc manet in te*, he reveals that he regularly consorted with boys during their Mediterranean honeymoon, leaving her to amuse herself as she thought fit. It may be that she was frigid, having been affected in adolescence by her mother's infidelity to her father. Gide gives two brilliantly written accounts of this family crisis, one in his autobiography and the other in the novel *La Porte étroite*, but he was obviously unable to help Madeleine to get over its effects, if effects there were. In *La Porte étroite*, he piously deplores the cruel blow inflicted on the heroine by her mother's behavior, but he doesn't seem to have reflected at that stage that his own infidelities must be causing Madeleine still more pain.

Late in life, Gide confided in Albert Camus that he had been ignorant that women have sexual urges and needs. This is hard to credit, since female sexual desire is a common enough theme in French literature, and in French schoolboy conversation. Perhaps he meant that he had put Madeleine on such a pedestal that he couldn't imagine her to have ordinary appetites. He certainly keeps repeating that his deep love for her was in no way diminished by his pagan lust for boys, as if there were no common denominator between the two feelings. However, it is not easy to understand what he meant by love, since he also says that he and she never once discussed the sexual question. What confidence can there have been between them, and in what sense was he a loving husband, if he could proclaim his homosexuality, and put her into an acutely embarrassing position as his wife, without first asking her permission to do so? In *Et nunc manet in te* he expresses retrospective amazement at his own cruelty and insensitivity, and well he might. Whatever his courage in "coming out," he must have known that he was pursuing his chosen course with Sadian or Nietzschean ruthlessness as far as she was concerned—indeed, he transparently admits as much both by the contents and the title of the novel *L'Immoraliste*—and this cannot enhance his acceptability as a model in the cause of homosexuality.

There are two further complications in Gide's peculiar sexuality. About the time of the 1914–18 war, he broke his own rule about only desiring boys by actually falling in love with one, at least for a time. This was Marc Allégret, who figures in the diary, and more prominently in *Les Cahiers de la Petite Dame*, the Boswell-like account of Gide kept by his lifelong friend, Mme Théo van Rysselberghe. The relationship with Marc Allégret was probably the nearest Gide ever came to the Greek ideal of mature mentor and lover/pupil, as described in *Corydon*, which he must have been writing about that time. The association seems to have been the last straw for Madeleine, and when, against her wishes, Gide accompanied Marc on a visit to England, she took her revenge by burning all the letters he had ever written to her. He presents this as a terrible tragedy, because he claimed to have put the best of himself into the correspondence (but how could he, if he had never been frank with her?), and adds: "It was as if she

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had killed our child," a strange phrase that implies that he saw his writing as the fruit of his womb that she had served to fertilize, through a curious inversion of roles. One cannot help suspecting that, consciously or unconsciously, he got his own back later—in fact, soon afterwards—by having a real child with Mme Théo's unmarried daughter, Elizabeth. This act of procreation by a famous homosexual remains completely mysterious; the great confessionalist himself is mute on the subject, and those of his friends whom I heard discussing the matter claimed not to understand. There is no indication that he was in love with Elizabeth, and even if he were politely acceding to her request to have a child, he must have known that Madeleine would be bitterly hurt, so once again his morality appears very uncertain.

It is almost as if, at times, he were conscientiously trying to be wicked, in order to prove to himself that he was free "beyond good and evil." As Mme Théo records in her deadpan way, even at the height of his involvement with Marc, and during the fateful stay in Grantchester, he seduced another boy at the school that Marc was attending; the boy told his parents and there was a slight scandal, which had to be hushed up. When Marc reproachfully asked, "Why did you do it, Uncle Gide?" he received the significant reply, "Par acquit de conscience" (to soothe, or clear, my conscience). In other words, Gide was so intent on experiencing life to the full that he felt it his duty to give in to every passing whim, without allowing moral considerations to intervene. This corresponds to a principle enunciated in *Les Nourritures terrestres*: act before considering whether your action is good or bad. The recommendation is only valid as a reaction against too oppressively moralistic a society; it is what the French call a *boutade*, a deliberately paradoxical half-truth, but it degenerates into nonsense outside a context of rigid conventionalism.

This Gidian itch to flout morality irresponsibly is given its strongest expression in the comic novel, *Les Caves du Vatican* (1914), where the dashing young hero, Lafcadio (a recognizable descendant of Stendhal's Julien Sorel and Dostoyevsky's Raskolnikov) lays a wager with himself that he will have the nerve to throw an unsuspecting elderly stranger out of a train window. He wins his bet, thus demonstrating the so-called *acte gratuit*, or pure expression of individual freedom. This famous episode anticipated by several years the no less famous sentence in *Le Manifeste Surréaliste* about the essential Surrealist act being to empty a revolver at random into a crowd. The philosophical point is the same in both cases: the "arbitrary act" is in reality an emotional response to the strain of living in the Absurd world, where there are no given rules of behavior, but only the endless, exasperating search for "moral" compromises. Being emotional, the act is, in fact, neither arbitrary nor gratuitous; it is a willfully irrational, explosive consequence of a passionate, egotistical relationship with the self. From the point of view of traditional humanism, it could be called sophisticated, imaginative hooliganism, harmless enough as long as it remains on the fictional level, and even useful as marking the absolute zero of morality. Gide, the celebrated reforming humanist, may have been incomprehensibly cruel to his wife, but he cannot actually have been in favor of throwing people out of train windows; writing before 1914, in the relative security of *la belle époque*, he no doubt saw himself as moving back the frontiers of complacent humanism by means of an amusing and stimulating fiction, and he deserves a measure of credit for doing so. However, writing some thirty years later, during the horrors of the Second World War, Simone Weil, who had no sense of humor, was perfectly justified in pointing out that the *acte gratuit* is a pseudo-philosophical alibi for every kind of viciousness, great and small.

Generally speaking, then, we can say that Gide had the courage to raise moral issues rather than the ability to suggest useful answers. Certainly, in the sexual area, neither his theories nor his personal conduct were coherently exemplary, and this no doubt helps to explain why he has not become an international hero of homosexuality. Not that he ever really aspired to this role, in spite of his intermittent proselytizing. He could collapse, on occasion, into complete skepticism about his moral convictions, as is shown by the disarming diary entry:

Je ne suis qu'un petit garçon qui s'amuse, doublé d'un pasteur protestant qui l'ennuie.*

*(I am just a little boy having fun, with a Protestant minister nagging away inside him.)

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A final reason for Gide's ambiguous position on the homosexual scene is that none of his literary works is openly homosexual, apart from the late novel *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*, and even that is only very discreetly so. *Les Nourritures terrestes*, his little pagan bible, is full of diffuse eroticism, which remains unspecific. At the height of his fame in the twenties and thirties, his reputation as a serious novelist rested on three *récits*, or novellas, *L'Immoraliste*, *La Porte étroite*, and *La Symphonie Pastorale*, which are all written ostensibly from the heterosexual angle. With hindsight, all three can now be read as transpositions of his personal sexual problem, although this could not be known to his readers at the time of publication. In each book, the narrator is a version of Gide himself, and Madeleine appears in a different guise in each. All three stories end tragically, and in the first two, the Madeleine figure dies. I sometimes wonder if Gide ever noticed that, in his collected works, he killed off his wife symbolically three, if not four, times long before she actually died.

L'Immoraliste (1901) follows the events of Gide's early life quite closely. The narrator, Michel, is a studious young man, just beginning on a successful career as a scholar, and recently married to a girl he has known since childhood. During their honeymoon in Tunisia, he discovers he has tuberculosis, and is immobilized in a village hotel, where he nearly dies. When he is at a low ebb, his wife, Marceline, happens to bring an Arab boy into his room to distract his attention from his illness. The sight of the healthy young body inspires him with a desire to recover, and there follows a long, ecstatic period of convalescence, during which Michel awakens to the life of the senses, so different from his bookish past. Marceline looks after him tenderly, but he derives his main stimulus from affectionate, but apparently platonic, dalliance with Arab boys. His conversion to the physical life is so complete that, upon returning to his country estate in France, he cannot play the part of the respectable landowner, but hobnobs with the lusty peasant lads who poach his own game. Meanwhile, he has made Marceline pregnant, but she loses the child through a miscarriage, which undermines her health. Michel becomes impatient with the restraints of French polite society, and longs again for the desert. This time, as they move south, it is Marceline who becomes tubercular. He is so obsessed with getting away from civilization that he presses on regardless, and she, unable to bear the strain, dies. Michel summons three of his old schoolfriends to the Arab village, where he has temporarily settled; he tells them his story, and asks them if he has behaved badly; they, surprisingly, leave the question open.

It must be obvious to any reader that Michel is a monster of selfishness, or in the grip of an ungovernable urge. In any case, the Nietzschean title, *L'Immoraliste*, implies the transcending of morality. Nevertheless, the conclusion of the book is almost comically sanctimonious in its attempt to half-exonerate the hero. Given the dishonesty of the work about the sexual motive, it should be a failure, but—apart from a few, over-precious sentences—it is so beautifully written, and gives such a subtle and rounded picture of the spoiled, introspective bourgeois discovering the "natural" life and being naively transported by it, that it has a kind of classic quality. Gide achieves such marvelously precise expression not only of the hero's sensual awakening, but also of his selfishness and self-deception, that one can both despise Michel and admire him for delineating himself so completely. One may wish that Gide had gone still further and told the whole truth, but the book, as it stands, is a compromise that works effectively on a certain level, although, of course, it makes no contribution to the homosexual cause.

La Porte étroite (1909) forms a pair with *L'Immoraliste* in the sense that, while the earlier book reflects Gide's quest for self-fulfillment whatever the consequences, the later appears at first sight to be an extreme elaboration on the theme of Madeleine's recessiveness. The work is still further removed from overt discussion of the sexual question, although the title can be given a Freudian interpretation, that Gide may, or may not, have intended. He probably knew nothing about Freud when he wrote the book, but he later remarked in his diary that "the imbecile of genius" had discovered the obvious that he himself had always been aware of. In the story, the gate is both a garden gate, where the hero and heroine have more than one significant meeting, and the "strait gate" of Luke 13.24, leading to the virtuous life. Since the theme is the hero's inability to persuade the heroine to renounce her virginity and marry

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him, there is an implied third narrow gate, which is particularly difficult of access.

The story is another version of the Gide/Madeleine relationship. Jérôme is in love with Alissa, whom he has known since childhood, whose mother has been unfaithful. This time, the heroine is two years older than the hero, as was the case in real life. At first, they commune in their Christian piety and in their shared enthusiasm for literature and music. When, stimulated by the example of a more worldly fellow student, Jérôme begins to think of marriage and wants to become engaged, Alissa puts him off, saying at first that she is too old for him and cannot be sure that his love will last. She also argues that they are already so intimately bound together by their common love of God that there is no urgency for marriage. From the first, it is clear that her attachment to Jérôme is in conflict with saintly aspirations.

Her next excuse is that she doesn't want to get married before her younger sister, Juliette. She has, in fact, discovered that Juliette is in love with Jérôme, and her motive this time is noble self-sacrifice. When Juliette realizes this, she resolves the situation by opting for a *mariage de convenance* with another suitor, and the marriage turns out to be happy. But still Alissa keeps putting Jérôme off, and, with time, she gradually turns herself into a sort of lay nun, devoted to stultifying good works. In the end, she wastes away, leaving behind a diary that reveals that she has never resolved the tension between human and divine love.

The major weakness of the book, which Gide later recognized in a diary entry but without tracing it back to his own sexuality, is the passive role played by Jérôme. If he had any physical passion for Alissa, he would try to overcome her resistance, instead of meekly obeying her every whim and allowing her to destroy herself. He is not a man, but a sexless blank. Alissa I take to be an extreme development of the negative element that was probably present in Madeleine, and at the same time a reflection of Gide's own early mystical fervor and its subsequent withering. However, the work is such a suave outpouring of Puritan piety that it is still apparently read in some quarters as a genuinely religious book. I find it too self-consciously sublime, as well as distasteful in its bland avoidance of the sexual roots of the case, but it has a certain interest as a study of generalized *anorexia nervosa*, at the opposite pole from the eager appetite for life in *L'Immoraliste*.

If *L'Immoraliste* was the thesis and *La Porte étroite* the antithesis, *La Symphonie Pastorale* (1919) can be seen as the synthesis. At first, it may appear quite unconnected with the Gide/Madeleine issue, but this is only because the symbolism is indirect. The narrator is a Swiss pastor in a remote mountain district, and he is full of pious expressions of goodwill as he copes with his parish, his five children, and his rather crotchety wife, Amélie. His parsonical tone is not unlike that of the Vicar of Wakefield, and we know from Gide's diary that he had read Goldsmith's novel. One day, when the pastor is called to the deathbed of an old peasant woman, he discovers in her cottage a blind, apparently imbecilic girl, her niece, who is left alone in the world. With Christian charity, he brings the girl home, much to the displeasure of Amélie, who however accepts the situation. They call the girl Gertrude. When the pastor realizes that she is not subnormal but only undeveloped, because her deaf old aunt has never been able to communicate with her, he embarks with enthusiasm on her education.

She blossoms into a pretty, sensitive creature, whom he instructs in the beauty of life with a passion he has never lavished on his own children. In particular, he is careful to shield her from all intimations of evil; hence, I suppose, the relevance of the Beethoven symphony that he takes Gertrude to hear in Neuchâtel; in this middle-period Beethoven work, evil, as represented by the thunderstorm, is set between movements celebrating the goodness of God and the beneficence of Nature. Evil breaks into the story, however; the pastor discovers that his grown-up son, Jacques, is in love with Gertrude and wants to marry her. He is amazed at his own jealousy, and equally taken aback when Gertrude tells him that she has refused Jacques, because she is in love with him, the pastor, and he with her. They seal their love with a kiss, and perhaps more.

Meanwhile, a doctor-friend has suggested that Gertrude's blindness might be cured by an operation. The restoration of her sight brings disaster. She realizes the sorrow she has brought to Amélie, and that Jacques, not the pastor, is the love-object she saw in her mind's eye. Overwhelmed by the revelation

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of evil, she throws herself into a river and, although rescued, dies of pneumonia, after a last explanation. Jacques, disgusted with his father's sentimental laxity, enters into holy orders and becomes a Catholic priest. The pastor and Amélie are left sorrowfully reciting the Lord's Prayer together.

This novella, which can be read at a sitting, is one of Gide's most remarkable achievements, a piece of verbal music composed in the most mellifluous and exquisitely modulated French, and ironically contradicting the optimism of Beethoven's symphony by the placing of evil at the end, instead of in the middle, of the pastoral structure. The pastor is clearly a parody of Gide himself, with his semi-pious, semi-pagan enthusiasms, his roving spirit and his didactic urge. Amélie is the long-suffering Madeleine, an almost silent witness to the vagaries of her husband's temperament. Gertrude can stand for any of the boys with whom Gide became infatuated to his wife's sorrow, and whom he helped or harmed by his attentions. If this reading is plausible, and I think it is, it shows that Gide cannot, in the last resort, be accused of insensitivity, or of having only the simplistic attitude to pederasty he sometimes expresses. All the delicate satire of the tale is directed by the Gide-figure against himself, the self-deceiving pastor, blinder than the blind girl, and who, while constantly quoting the New Testament, paves the way to Hell with good intentions. In other words, the pastor is, after Michel and Jérôme, a third embodiment of the author's problem, and this time he comes to realize that he is in a web of human relationships that has been wrecked by the unconscious egotism with which he has pursued a natural impulse.

In addition to being lyrical and humorous, the book is genuinely tragic, in a way *L'Immoraliste* and *La Porte étroite* are not. It is a nonpartisan work of art, which holds the moral issue in balance without resolving it, and although homosexuality was no doubt the key issue behind its composition, it can be appreciated without any reference to that subject. Here Gide has completely succeeded in transposing the particular into the general, which, as he, I think, rightly says, is the function of art.

With the writing of *La Symphonie Pastorale,* Gide appears to have finally exorcized his problem as a married homosexual, unable to separate from his wife or to discuss the matter openly with her. In real life, the problem did not go away, but he had sloughed off his worry about it, and it ceased to be a source of literary inspiration. If, at an early stage, he had behaved like another nineteenth-century homosexual—the English art historian John Addington Symonds, who, after fathering a number of children, decided that heterosexuality was not for him and came to an amicable arrangement with his wife—French literature would probably have been the poorer by at least three books. Such are the quirks of creativity.

But the slackening of the guilty tension did not lead to Gide's emergence as a specifically homosexual novelist. In his last major work of fiction, *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* (1926), sexual deviance is openly present, but, surprisingly enough, in the muted form of a minor tendency, half-virtuous and half-wicked, in a predominantly heterosexual society. The book is a summa, encompassing all of Gide's different styles: the lyrical, the Absurdist-humorous, and the analytical, and touching on all of his previous themes: the nature/culture dichotomy, religion as a source of good and as a hypocritical alibi, the question of realism in art, and, above all, as the title indicates, the problem of authentic living. I am not sure that it is a total success, but it is his most ambitious creation and a book with great qualities. It consists of a complex interweaving of various different stories involving a score or more of characters, and cannot be summarized in a few words. Suffice it to say that it again contains a Gide-figure, the novelist and compulsive diarist, Edouard.

It is never openly stated that Edouard is a pederast; although unmarried, he may have had physical relations with women; but, as the story begins, he is interested in an adolescent, Olivier, whom he has just got to know, and who is the son of his half-sister, Pauline. (This may reflect the fact that Marc Allégret was related to Gide; perhaps incest is relatively unimportant within homosexuality, since it can have no genetic consequences). Olivier, in return, is tremulously enthusiastic about Edouard but, misinterpreting the latter's behavior, in a fit of pique becomes involved with Comte de Passavant, a fashionable, superficial man of letters with a homosexual reputation, and who is presented in fact as a "bad" homosexual. (According to

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gossip, the model here was Cocteau, who had shown an interest in Marc, but the character seems very different from Cocteau.) Passavant wants to found a new, deliberately scandalous, literary paper, of which Olivier is to be editor, although he is just out of school. It is implied that Olivier's appointment, like the new wardrobe Passavant has supplied, is a reward for services rendered.

In the end, nothing comes of the project. Olivier gets drunk at the launching party, becomes involved in a brawl, sees through Passavant's phoniness, and appeals for help to Edouard, who happens to be present. Edouard carries him off, presumably to bed. During the night, unhinged by drink and the bliss he has experienced with Edouard, Olivier tries to gas himself in the bathroom. He is found in time by Edouard and nursed back to health. Rather reluctantly, Pauline accepts the situation, because she thinks that Edouard will have a better influence on her son than Passavant. We are not told about the reaction of Olivier's father, a prominent magistrate, nor do we see any subsequent development of the Edouard/Olivier liaison.

Although the pederastic idyll is handled with delicate, springlike lyricism, it is only a very small element in the book, and we are even left in doubt about how far it is physical. Besides, Olivier is a rather dim figure, with no particular quality apart from his beauty, which is frequently mentioned, and he is outshone by his heterosexual schoolfriend Bernard, with whom Edouard has some interesting intellectual discussions, and who is an altogether more rounded personality. There is also a hint that Olivier may be only a very temporary sex object, soon to be replaced by a younger boy, in whom Edouard suddenly expresses an interest in the very last sentence of the book. If this is so, Gide is suggesting that the pederastic relationship can never be taken very far by the adult, since it depends less on the personal identity of the loved one than on his attraction as a provisional embodiment of youthful charm; in short, a pederast is probably more in love with youth and beauty than with any particular individual, and this is hardly an attitude that lends itself to a crusading development. At no point, indeed, does Edouard speak out in favor of homosexuality, although he argues about many other subjects.

Perhaps Gide, as he is sometimes inclined to do, is deliberately teasing the reader who, at this point, might have expected a triumphant hymn to homosexuality from so scandalous an author. Or perhaps he had reached a stage when he accepted his deviance with relative serenity as being appropriate for himself, but no longer had any strong conviction about it being as morally pure, or as universally valid, as he once thought. In either case, if there is a homosexual lobby, it must find *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*, whatever the book's other virtues, of little representational value to the cause.

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Books

The Well-Wrought Sax

TERRY TEACHOUT

EARLY JAZZ: ITS ROOTS AND MUSICAL DEVELOPMENT. *By Gunther Schuller. Oxford University Press. $25. Paper, $9.95.*
THE SWING ERA: THE DEVELOPMENT OF JAZZ, 1930–1945. *By Gunther Schuller. Oxford University Press. $30.*

Back when I lived in Kansas City, I used to work for a piano player who liked to sip Scotch and soda between sets. While sipping, he would occasionally direct avuncular words of musical advice (or warning) at the younger members of the band. These homilies, couched in deceptively casual tones, invariably began with the attention-getting phrase "The first time I played with Charlie Parker. . . ." No particular stress was placed on the word *first*. None was necessary. We got the point. He had played with Bird *more than once*, which was more than any of us miserable young punks could claim, the great jazz saxophone player having died long before we were born. Our best bet, in other words, was to shut our ignorant traps, listen meekly to the voice of experience, and do as we were told—which, more often than not, we did.

Chats like these were for a very long time the primary means by which the history, folklore, and techniques of jazz were transmitted from generation to generation. You didn't go to school to learn jazz. You learned it from listening to records or, if you were lucky, in informal "lessons" cadged from old-timers in return for drinks and admiration. Nor were there any jazz historians. "History" consisted of the stories you heard at the bar or on the bus. Most of the legendary figures in jazz who didn't drink themselves to death or shoot up one time too many survived well into the 1960s and beyond. As a result, there was a better than reasonable chance that if you were any good, you would sooner or later play a gig with somebody who had worked with Benny Goodman or Duke Ellington—or, god of gods, Charlie Parker—and who had a tale or two to tell.

Historical self-consciousness came only gradually to jazz. Books about arranging appeared as early as 1926, but they were utterly practical do-it-yourself tomes; similarly, the first memoirs (of Goodman and Louis Armstrong) were little more than ghost-written exercises in public relations. Jazz "scholarship" of a less utilitarian kind took longer to emerge. Although general histories, biographies, discographies, and primitive analytic studies began to appear in the late thirties, the best of these books were the work of fans and journalists and, occasionally, musicians. Even when the academy finally caught up with jazz in the 1950s, what it taught was *applied* jazz: how to play your horn well enough to get a job with Stan Kenton or Buddy Rich. I can't think of a single book about jazz of lasting worth (as opposed to historical significance) that was written by an academic before 1968.

Then came Gunther Schuller's *Early Jazz: Its Roots and Musical Development*, the first book about jazz to possess all the accepted outward signs of scholarly respectability. Published by Oxford University Press, *Early Jazz* came equipped with blurbs by everybody

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from John Lewis, pianist for the Modern Jazz Quartet, to Milton Babbitt, the most aggressively highbrow composer in the Western Hemisphere. The typography was elegant, the language sober, the author's musical pedigree impeccable. Schuller was president of the New England Conservatory of Music; he had spent fourteen years playing French horn in the Metropolitan Opera House pit orchestra; his own classical compositions were widely respected. Best of all, he had even played on one of the most important recording sessions in jazz history, Miles Davis's second *Birth of the Cool* session for Capitol Records in 1949.

Despite various inaccuracies and idiosyncrasies that weren't immediately apparent at the time, *Early Jazz* was a genuinely good book, a serious attempt to analyze jazz from a musical standpoint rather than as an epiphenomenon of sociology or economics or black studies. Moreover, Schuller wrote as an insider, not as a musical anthropologist. "If you gotta ask," Louis Armstrong is supposed to have said when asked to define swing, "you'll never know." Gunther Schuller knew, by and large, what was good and what was bad without having to be told. But even if *Early Jazz* had been a less worthy book, it would have served its larger purpose more than adequately. It was possible to point to *Early Jazz* and say: "*This* is what jazz scholarship ought to be." A lot of people did exactly that. Oxford started to develop a substantial jazz list; ethnomusicologists discovered jazz and appropriated it for their own dark and tangled purposes; unintelligible quarterlies devoted to the parsing of Lester Young solos began to appear. Within a decade of the publication of *Early Jazz,* it had become possible, at a growing number of institutions of higher learning, to study jazz as a scholar rather than as a performer.

Meanwhile, Gunther Schuller, the man who started it all, kept plugging away. In the preface to *Early Jazz,* Schuller explained that "the amount of material to be covered and heard in what purports to be a comprehensive history of jazz music soon made it apparent that this study would have to be divided into two volumes." Last year, just as everybody was about to give up on volume 2, Oxford finally brought out *The Swing Era: The Development of Jazz, 1930–1945,* the second installment in what Schuller now says will be a three-volume history of jazz. In preparing *The Swing Era,* Schuller decided to listen to "*every recording* [his italics] of any artist, orchestra or group that would come under discussion," an unprecedented effort that ultimately led him to listen to some thirty thousand recordings. The resulting book is 919 pages long and contains more than 500 musical examples and a 4,000-item index. No other book about jazz, not even *Early Jazz,* discusses its subject in such copious detail.

The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz, published around the same time as *The Swing Era,* is a stout pair of tombstone-sized volumes assembled under the auspices of Macmillan, the publishers responsible for *The New Grove Dictionary of Music,* the major English-language repository for secondary statements about music history. The publication of *Jazz Grove* was a considerable surprise. *The New Grove,* after all, had contained nearly two hundred articles on jazz, while *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music,* published six years later, contained more than four hundred. No one expected a *Grove* devoted solely to jazz, much less a double-decker encyclopedia. The editor, Barry Kernfeld, describes *Jazz Grove* as "the largest dictionary of the music ever published" and notes that it is organized according to "established principles of lexicographical organization and scholarly presentation that have never before been applied to jazz." Both statements are obviously and impressively true.

The Swing Era and *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz* appeared at first blush to be the fulfillment of a long-standing dream of mine. I had watched the initial growth of what came to be known as "jazz studies" with considerable interest, for I was a working jazz critic (for the Kansas City *Star)* in the late 1970s. In the wake of *Early Jazz,* I clamored as hard as anyone for more and better research; I cheered the publication of every halfway serious book about jazz that came down the pike; I griped about low scholarly standards and called stridently for higher ones. It took long enough, but *The Swing Era* and *Jazz Grove* appeared between them to have laid the groundwork for precisely the kind of jazz scholarship I had been advocating, and nothing could have pleased me more.

But I was also a working jazz musician in the late 1970s, playing gigs every weekend in

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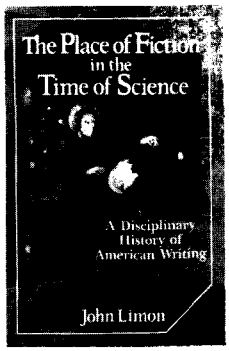

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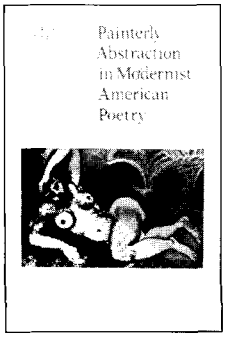

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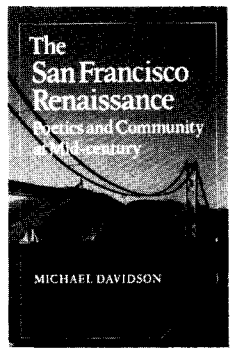

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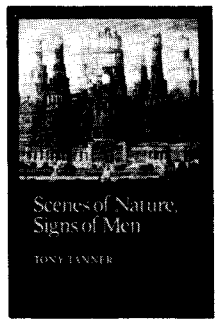

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scruffy-looking dives with names like The Lucky Penny. I had taught myself how to play bass, and I spent most of my time working with hard-boiled autodidacts who had never read a book about jazz in their lives, who studied not at Berkeley or North Texas State but at the Kansas City campus of the School of Hard Knocks. Their classrooms were bandstands and bars, their textbooks battered phonograph records and fondly remembered gigs with Charlie Parker. Playing with these men, not surprisingly, left me of two minds about *Early Jazz* and its scholarly aftermath. While one part of me dreamed fervently of academic respectability for the music I loved, the other, perhaps inevitably, was more than a little dubious about what Schuller & Co. had wrought.

My nagging, working-musician doubts about the utility of the new jazz scholarship received a sharp boost as soon as I cast a cold eye on *The Swing Era* and *Jazz Grove*. Both books looked imposing, miraculously so. But appearances, as it turned out, were deceiving, and after the initial wave of enthusiasm subsided, the scholarly assassins moved in for the kill. *Jazz Grove*, in particular, was subjected to a landslide of harsh criticism. The jazz critic Gene Lees has summed up reaction to *Jazz Grove* as follows: "The book has caused . . . a state of almost stunned disillusion. It has had the curious effect of bringing together writers of all political and aesthetic prejudices and persuasions in a common view. It may be the first time they have ever agreed on anything, and what they agree on is this: that the book is a disaster."

To be sure, any encyclopedia is an easy mark for nit-picking, and many of the entries in *Jazz Grove* are undeniably first-rate; James Lincoln Collier's brilliant key entry "Jazz," for example, is the best short discussion of the history and development of jazz that I know. But far too many of the biographical entries contain significant errors of fact and interpretation, are full of wildly arbitrary critical judgments, and are burdened with capriciously assembled discographies. A few major figures and a substantial number of less famous but still important ones are left out altogether. (Peggy Lee is the most astonishing omission.) The overall balance is, to say the least, erratic. Bessie Smith, the most important blues singer of the 1920s, is covered in a forty-two-line entry, a ten-item discography, and a six-item bibliography; Jean-Luc Ponty, a trendy jazz-rock violinist of the 1970s receives sixty lines, twelve discographical entries, and nine bibliographical entries.

To read *Jazz Grove* from cover to cover is to come away with the distinct feeling that much of it was written by kids—that is, by inexperienced graduate students who made sloppy and uncritical use of unfamiliar secondary sources. Gunther Schuller is no kid, but *The Swing Era*, like *Jazz Grove*, is disfigured by dozens of sloppy mistakes, several of which clearly suggest that the book was dictated but not read. (One inexcusable but amusing example: Eddie Condon's 1938 recording of "Serenade to a Shylock" is rendered, in text and index alike, as "Serenade to a Skylark.") Schuller's carelessness, I regret to say, has been conspicuously aided and abetted by Oxford University Press, where editorial standards have apparently taken a serious slide since *Early Jazz* was published two decades ago. Unlike *Early Jazz*, *The Swing Era* appears to have been neither fact checked nor copyedited, and it is littered with haphazard sentences that should never have seen print: "Further, there is a remarkable progression—perhaps accidental (but in art nothing is *truly* accidental)—through the three solos in the degree of jazz-ness."

A competent editor, in addition to combing such sentences out of *The Swing Era*, would have suggested that Schuller present certain arbitrary critical judgments less assertively and more rigorously. (Here is Schuller on Count Basie's fabled piano style: "And through the years the mannerisms, which in 1938 were already becoming quite predictable, long since, alas, turned into empty mechanical ciphers, which the fingers twiddle out mindlessly.") He would have dealt ruthlessly with Schuller's penchant for meaninglessly pretentious cross-cultural comparisons. ("One may not entirely fancy Powell's march-like introduction and coda for *Mission to Moscow*, but it is admittedly catchy with its 3 + 2 + 3 Balkan dance syncopations.") He would have insisted that Schuller include a section on Fats Waller. Most of all, he would have flatly refused to publish a "history of jazz" that included neither source notes nor bibliography.

These failings would be less exasperating were it not for the fact that Gunther Schuller is one of a very few historians of jazz with a

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truly synoptic knowledge of his subject. Schuller's judgments, if intermittently erratic, are clearly the work of a man who has thought deeply about jazz. He is refreshingly immune to the winds of academic fashion, including the currently prevailing (and increasingly ugly) racial ones; for example, he treats Bunny Berigan and Red Norvo as major figures, and his discussions of the big bands of Glenn Miller, Harry James, and Woody Herman are judicious and astute. He offers the first detailed critical appraisals of the King Cole Trio and the Joe Mooney Quartet to see print. His five-hundred-odd musical examples, though marred from time to time by inaccurate transcription, are in and of themselves a unique contribution to jazz scholarship.

But Schuller's critical analysis, even at its most penetrating, takes place in a biographical vacuum. He blithely spins hypothetical webs of stylistic influence without benefit of historical evidence. ("Though I cannot find reliable corroboration of the fact, I am convinced that Alston must have been a major influence on Charlie Shavers, whose work with the Kirby Sextet is but a faster, more fluent example of the kinds of technique and ideas in which Alston excelled.") He brags about the thirty thousand records to which he has listened, but he has next to nothing to say about the circumstances under which those records were made—possibly because, as the absence of source notes and bibliography suggests, he has failed to do his homework. He makes outright blunders that could have been avoided with a minimum of effort. Schuller's long chapter about Duke Ellington, for example, contains the following remarks about Mercer Ellington, Duke's son, who wrote and arranged for the Ellington orchestra in the forties:

> But again, how exactly Mercer's composing and arranging interacted with his father's and the orchestra's work, remains obscure and conjectural. Whether Mercer Ellington actually composed and arranged a masterpiece like *Moon Mist* at age twenty-two, or whether he wrote only the composition—certainly no minor achievement—and his father arranged it, or whether the two collaborated as co-composers, or whether Duke wrote and arranged it and merely ascribed it to Mercer as a gift—these and other questions linger on unanswered.

There is, of course, no reason why the question of who wrote "Moon Mist" should "linger on unanswered," since Mercer Ellington is alive and well and leading the Duke Ellington Orchestra—and, more to the point, since he answered it himself twelve years ago in *Duke Ellington in Person: An Intimate Memoir*, published in 1978 by Houghton Mifflin and still in print in a Da Capo paperback edition. (Duke supplied the harmonies; Mercer wrote and arranged the piece under Duke's "supervision.") The fact that Gunther Schuller never bothered to call up Mercer Ellington is symptomatic of the greatest weakness of *The Swing Era*: the way in which it floats in a gray void of biographical ignorance.

One could argue in Schuller's defense that *The Swing Era* was meant to serve as a jazz equivalent of Cleanth Brooks's *Well-Wrought Urn*, an austerely technical analysis of the language of jazz, albeit one that the author perversely insists on passing off as "a comprehensive history of jazz music." No such defense of *Jazz Grove* is possible. Like any encyclopedia, it is in large part a collection of biographical data. Unfortunately, most of the biographical entries contain the kind of information you would find in a reasonably accurate resumé—and nothing more. It's as if the musicians discussed in *Jazz Grove* were lifeless robots that existed solely to play jazz. Consider, for example, the entry on baritone saxophonist Serge Chaloff. "Persistent ill-health," it reads, "made Chaloff less active in the 1950s, though he continued to record almost up to his death." In fact, Chaloff was a heroin addict and a notorious drug dealer, known throughout the business as the pharmacist for Woody Herman's dope-drenched Second Herd; he contracted spinal cancer after leaving the Herman band and faced it bravely, playing his last gigs and recording sessions sitting in a chair. *Jazz Grove* has nothing to say about any of this. Similarly, one learns from the "Oscar Peterson" entry that Peterson has "an exceptional gift for inspiring awe from musicians, critics, and listeners alike." In fact, jazz critics have been heaping abuse on Oscar Peterson for decades, and he hates them for it; his published remarks about critics have been as venomous as the reviews that inspired them, though neither is mentioned in *Jazz Grove*.

Such things matter because jazz, being for the most part an improvised music, necessarily exists at the intersection of the improviser's personality and the circumstances under

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which he is improvising. Jazz is without question an art, but it is, as Benny Green astutely put it, a reluctant art, surrounded by a thousand non-artistic considerations, and if you don't understand the people who play it, you don't understand it, period. Barry Kernfeld and the authors of *Jazz Grove* have done a hopelessly inadequate job of fostering this kind of understanding. For *Jazz Grove* to cite the "personal difficulties and health problems" of "Bill Evans" while neglecting to explain that the real Bill Evans was addicted to heroin for much of his adult life is an act of scholarly irresponsibility; for *Jazz Grove* to portray "Benny Goodman" as one of the greatest clarinetists of the century while making no mention whatsoever of the fact that the real Benny Goodman was also one of the greatest jerks of the century, a petty tyrant universally despised by his sidemen, comes near to being an act of outright censorship.

In *The Swing Era,* Gunther Schuller makes the following remark about Ben Webster, Duke Ellington's celebrated tenor saxophone soloist: "As with most truly great art, Webster's cannot be fully explained. And when he played, it didn't need to be." Quite so. Analysis can only capture the residue of jazz, not the thing itself. By the same token, you don't have to know anything about Louis Armstrong's life for your eyes to fill with tears when you hear the opening cadenza of "West End Blues." But to go beyond the immediate sensuous apprehension of jazz in search of greater musical understanding is to run squarely into the need for richly detailed biographical data. Any scholar who writes about jazz as a pure science divorced from the specifics of personality, who fails to acknowledge that it is an exhalation of the soul rather than a premeditated act of artistic judgment, is wasting his time.

Given all of this, it should come as no surprise that the best books about jazz continue to be written outside the academy. Gary Giddins's *Satchmo,* Gene Lees's *Meet Me at Jim & Andy's,* Whitney Balliett's various collections of *New Yorker* profiles, the fugitive essays of the late Otis Ferguson: these are the writings about jazz that matter, and it is no coincidence that they are largely biographical. Nor is it coincidental that we have yet to see a truly first-rate full-scale jazz biography, a book comparable in quality to, say, Painter's Proust or Edel's James. Such books are the proper province of full-time scholars, and *The Swing Era* and *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz* provide ample evidence of the anti-biographical bias of jazz scholarship today. Until it is checked, this deadly prejudice will continue to result in numbingly pedantic monographs that bear no relationship to jazz as it is actually played—and lived.

Time on His Hands

NEW ORDER OF THE AGES: TIME, THE CONSTITUTION, AND THE MAKING OF MODERN AMERICAN POLITICAL THOUGHT. *By Michael Lienesch. Princeton University Press. $20.*

Reviewed by MARC M. ARKIN

Michael Lienesch begins his new intellectual history of the early republic by announcing that "between the Peace of Paris in 1783 and the election of Thomas Jefferson in 1800, America became a modern nation." What he means by this, he explains, is that in the "turbulent days that ran from Revolution to Constitution and beyond, there was a transition in political thinking as classical republican theory began to be challenged by what would come to be called modern liberalism"; beneath this transition lay an even more "fundamental transformation, the change from classical to modern ways of viewing the world."

Lienesch tells us that he not only will describe these changes but will try to "show how these political and temporal ways of thinking converged in the politics of the period leading Americans to transform the fundamental precepts of their politics, and to create in the process a new political order." Leinesch's aim is to chronicle these developments by examining American political discourse during the two decades in which Americans adopted their Constitution and then learned to live with it. "In short," as Lienesch announces, "this book is about time and politics, or, to borrow a phrase from

✪ MARC M. ARKIN is an associate professor of law at Fordham University.

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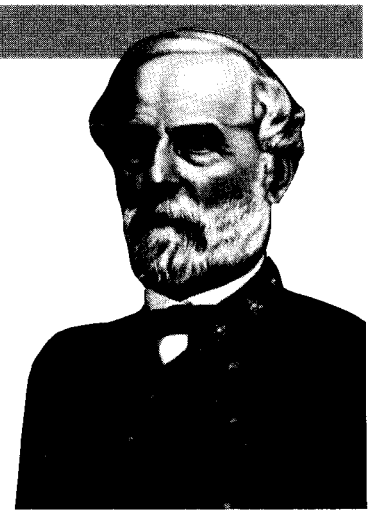

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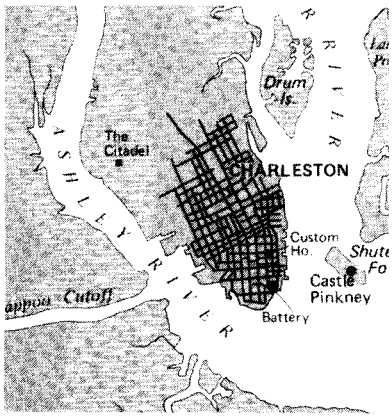

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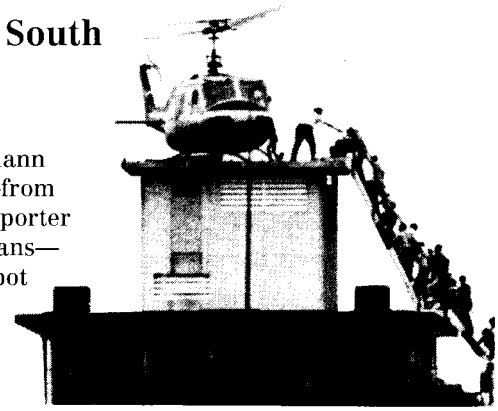

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J. G. A. Pocock, about the politics of time." Heady stuff.

Lienesch further explains that until recently historians and political theorists "have tended to overlook the role of time in American politics, in large part because scholars have tended to see America as a uniquely modern nation." Now we begin to get an inkling of what is in store for the reader; we may read "time" as a new word for what the last generation of scholars called "the past," and we may expect to find ourselves embarked on an updated version of that rather pleasant scholarly ramble which, if I remember correctly, was once called "the search for a usable past." Not so, Lienesch assures us, and in the process he provides a very thorough review of the historiographical landscape, beginning with the discovery of the classical republican tradition in American thought and ending with the recent rediscovery of liberalism as the source of American political theory. In essence, the historiographical pendulum has moved from Aristotle and Machiavelli back to Locke—as Lienesch suggests, an all too emphatic rediscovery of Locke.

In fact, Lienesch tells us, both sides are partly right and partly wrong. "The truth," as it so often does, "lies somewhere in between." Here we come to the major insight of Lienesch's book: things were more complicated than previous historians have recognized. Liberal and republican views were held by the same people. Americans of the 1780s and 1790s "found themselves clinging to the ideals of the classical past, while at the same time admitting the practical advantages of modern times." The key word here—as the reader may already have guessed—is *tension.* Lienesch tells us that "the tensions, there at the beginning, were crucial to the making of American political thought, and thus . . . continue to be part of our politics today."

The method of this study, we are told, is to examine a series of concepts—change, reform, development, experience, founding, posterity, and destiny—as they appear in the political discourse of the time, a discourse that Lienesch limits to "public speech and public writing." The book relies heavily on debates, essays, and treatises, as well as speeches and politically oriented sermons. The difficulty inherent in this approach is that it tends to give equal weight to the Federalist Papers and, say, the 1795 Massachusetts Election Day Sermon of the Reverend Peres Fobes. No doubt the Reverend Fobes believed himself to be writing for the ages, and no doubt his views reflected those of his contemporaries, but Hamilton he was not, in either influence, audience, or distinction of thought. This is not to say that the two types of sources cannot be used to great profit in a single study—only that distinctions must be drawn and that Mr. Lienesch does not draw them.

Yet, these are probably the only distinctions Mr. Lienesch does not draw. If an author's point is that things are more complicated than they seemed to earlier scholars, he must make good on this insight. Lienesch argues that as "the political thought of the time divided and subdivided into divergent intellectual strains, so thinkers of the time could be found forming and reforming into contending ideological camps." These camps or "persuasions" were more fluid than formal parties, permitting internal inconsistencies and conflicts as well as movement between groups. Thus, we are told that the politics of the 1790s were "in a few cases continuous and consistent, in many others discontinuous and inconsistent, but in general a politics of tension in which the classical and modern converged and diverged, sometimes within the minds of these very thinkers themselves." This insight should not surprise anyone who has ever attended any sort of political meeting.

Lienesch then proceeds to spend the next two hundred pages identifying these amorphous "persuasions." We learn that persuasions come in pairs. We have court republicans and country republicans, radical republicans and constitutional conservatives, Federalists and Anti-Federalists, to name a few. Each persuasion is identified with one side of what appears to be, not surprisingly, a two-sided issue. Court republicans are identified with a historical theory of progress, country republicans believe in decline; radical republicans believe that government corrupts the freedom of the people, constitutional conservatives believe that strong government is the only bulwark against popular excess, and so on into the night.

Persuasions even take on diametrically opposed personal characteristics. Federalists are audacious and ambitious, Anti-Federalists are shortsighted and fearful of the future. There are enough dichotomies in this book to satisfy

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even an orthodox Hegelian with intellectual tapeworm. Occasionally a thesis and antithesis even yield a synthesis. Some dissatisfied country republicans, for example, embrace court views to become "transitional thinkers." In that guise, they abandon their previous view that prosperity is antithetical to freedom and, instead, believe that prosperity merely has a tendency to corrupt the citizenry, a tendency that can be counteracted by reform.

By now the reader has probably developed a mild curiosity regarding the identity of these people—these constitutionalists and opponents, millennialists and progressives, Federalists and Anti-Federalists. Each of eight chapters has introduced a new persuasion (or two) so that by the next to last chapter—a somewhat thin discussion of millennial thought in the late eighteenth century—even the most attentive reader is left wondering who belongs to these groups and how, if at all, they overlap. Do radical republicans turn into progressives or millennialists? Are the Federalists in chapter 8 the same as the federalists in chapter 5? Are rationalists the same as progressives? The answer, I am afraid, is nowhere to be found. This is a book of disembodied ideas. It tells us little, if anything, about who or why persons were drawn to particular constellations of ideas. Was it social class, economic interest, regional loyalty, religious affiliation? Mr. Lienesch has nothing to tell the reader about this; it is apparently beyond the scope of his enterprise.

It is tempting to dismiss this book as an example of what the late Sydney Ahlstrom called his first law of historiography: the shorter the time period selected for study, the more fragmented any intellectual movement appears. If the focus is tight enough, movements disappear altogether, leaving nothing but loose conglomerations of people with a few ideas in common. Taken on this level, Mr. Lienesch's focus is tight indeed. Less charitably, one is reminded of the Borges story, "Funes the Memorious," in which Funes, a young man with a perfect memory of each experience he has ever had, lives in a world teeming with detail. Unable to forget, he cannot impose coherence on his world; unable to categorize, he finds each bit of memory to be of equal and therefore indistinguishable value.

Unfortunately, I think that the problem with this book is more serious than merely smothering under the weight of its own abstraction and detail. Mr. Lienesch falls prey to a variant of the academic fallacy that I will call "the new nominalism": to give something a name is to say something significant about it. Applied to historical research, this is a particularly unsatisfying exercise since it does not tell us whether the categories were recognized by contemporaries, or, in the case of Mr. Lienesch's book, whether these eight concepts held the same significance for those alive at the time under discussion as they do for Mr. Lienesch—at a two-hundred-year remove. Simply put, this is a remarkably ahistorical kind of history.

And, ultimately, this is a disappointing book. It begins most promisingly, with a quotation in the preface from St. Augustine: "What then is time? I know what it is if no one asks me what it is: but if I want to explain it to someone who has asked me I find that I do not know." We are led to believe that the book will enhance the reader's understanding of how the founding generation thought about time and the political order. The phrase "Machiavellian moment," so romantic and enticing, looms large in the early going. But this initial promise does not bear out. *Time* is merely a new word for an old idea. Similarly, the insights underlying the book are well worn. In a chapter on constitutional character, we learn that the institutionalization of revolutionary impulses leads to conservatism—in this case, a desire to create a nation of stable burghers who could preserve the revolutionary legacy through economic quietism. Although Mr. Lienesch appears to find this a fresh and unexpected notion, I am not sure that it would have struck Max Weber the same way.

Despite these serious drawbacks, the deftness with which Lienesch handles the historiographical background is quite impressive. Lienesch's very capable treatment of the secondary literature is the strongest aspect of the book and may make the work of interest to a lay reader who wishes to come abreast of current scholarly trends. But in the end Mr. Lienesch falls prey to the same ailment he diagnoses in the millennialists of the eighteenth century: he becomes a prisoner of his own metaphors.

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Son of the Morning After

CAVALIER IN BUCKSKIN: GEORGE ARMSTRONG CUSTER AND THE WESTERN MILITARY FRONTIER. *By Robert M. Utley. University of Oklahoma Press. $19.95.*

Reviewed by WAYNE MICHAEL SARF

In 1985 two men in a bar began arguing about Custer's Last Stand; one went home, got a gun, and returned to shoot the other. My own reaction was, of course, frustration over not learning just *which* Custer controversy had inspired the argument. Surprise was not an option; feuds over the Battle of the Little Bighorn being what they are, perhaps the real shock was the fact that it took so long for gunfire to erupt.

Robert M. Utley, the premier historian of our western Indian wars, addressed the furor in his first book, the 1962 *Custer and the Great Controversy*. Returning to the subject periodically—and, one suspects, inescapably—he was an obvious choice for this first volume of the Oklahoma Western Biographies series, *Cavalier in Buckskin*, which some have termed the best biography of George Armstrong Custer ever written. It is.

But it is a *necessary* biography largely because the competition, part of a vast literature enveloping Custer and his last battle, is less formidable than it should be. Frederick Whittaker's cut-and-paste *A Complete Life of Gen. George A. Custer*, published a naked six months after the 1876 debacle, proved a grim herald of things to come. Hero worship initially dominated, with Custer's widow Elizabeth helping to shape public opinion with three books glorifying her husband's memory—charming, but often deliberately vague or confusing. When the inevitable reaction set in, the results were debunking rather than illuminating; Frederic F. Van de Water's influential *Glory-Hunter* (1934) stripped off the halo, but revealed most clearly its author's unhealthy hatred of a dead man.

Jay Monoghan's 1959 *Custer*, surpassing all previous efforts, featured a few novelistic touches and covered his hero's frontier years inadequately, but kept its pro-Custer partisanship in check. D. A. Kinsley's two-volume *Favor the Bold* (1967, 1968), largely fictionalized tripe, did not. With the love-him-or-hate-him Custer affecting later writers much as he did his contemporaries, many attracted to the subject make no pretense of objectivity. In books such as *The Custer Album*, Lawrence A. Frost not only tended to take Custer's side in all controversies, but flattened them into blandness by not recognizing that there could *be* another side.

Gregory J. W. Urwin's stirring *Custer Victorious* (1983) proved the best account of the Civil War years, though marred by an understandably defensive approach to its maligned hero. The vats of embarrassing critical gush inspired by Evan S. Connell's 1984 best-seller *Son of the Morning Star: Custer and the Little Bighorn* suggested that no one other than a military or Custer buff—preferably the sort who, in envisioning a Soviet nuclear strike against Montana's missile silos, would dread its incidental effect on the topography of Custer Battlefield—could safely review such a work, which combined a pack rat's approach to source material with a complete absence of historical perspective and an anti-linear "narrative" resembling index cards of research data run through a blender. While buffs' complaints led an obliging Connell to correct various errors in later printings, lay readers who knew little of Custer before reading the book risked knowing even less afterward.

Perhaps Utley is too good to achieve such blockbuster best-seller status, coupling his knowledge with a refreshing humility and an open mind. He even asks whether we *need* another biography—admitting that his own motives included the desire for work "to coerce me into deciding what I thought" after decades of study. Having lived with Custer "intimately" since age eleven, when he saw Errol Flynn in *They Died with Their Boots On*, he recognizes that the mortal man is less important than the undying legend, the seeds of which began to sprout almost as soon as the shocking news hit the East. A mysterious, no-survivors defeat and a controversial celebrity kindled a fascination far in excess of either's "real" significance. Little Bighorn became a new Thermopylae, with factual gaps becomingly filled in; to an 1881 account of Custer "striking out like a fatally wounded

WAYNE MICHAEL SARF is the author of *God Bless You, Buffalo Bill: A Layman's Guide to History and the Western Film.*

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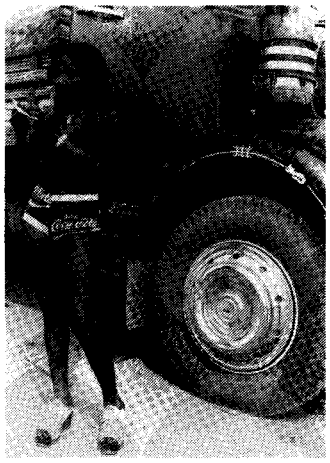

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giant" to slay three Indians and break his sword on another's musket before falling back, "victim of a dozen wounds," Utley adds dryly: "No one knows when he died, or how he died, or even where he died. He bore two wounds, not a dozen. Neither he nor anyone else carried a sword."

While debate, informed and otherwise, raged over Custer's defeat, the legend was spread by Whitman, Longfellow, and lesser bards; through paintings and an Anheuser-Busch saloon print; through films, climaxing with Flynn's definitive swashbuckler in 1941: "Because it was instantly recognizable by almost everyone, the single word, 'Custer,' became synonymous with whichever character traits one wished to assign him . . . a synonym for the lost cause, the forlorn hope, the total disaster looming momentarily in whatever context one applied it." But for the same reason, the symbolic Indian fighter inevitably came to personify paleface "genocide": in the 1970 film *Little Big Man,* jibbering insanely, he died for our sins in both the Indian wars *and* in Vietnam, while in 1976 and 1986 Indian "activist" Russell Means led like-minded hoodlums in desecrating a mass grave of Custer's soldiers on Custer Hill.

Despite a death at thirty-six, Custer's life was so controversial, his personality so contradictory, that Utley's ability to sketch both in little more than two hundred pages is testament to his skill. Born in Ohio in 1839, spending much of his youth in Michigan, this ambitious blacksmith's son qualified to teach grammar school at seventeen. Young George apparently moved fast in more ways than one: "Before his twentieth birthday either Mollie, Lizzie, Mary, and one not named had been to bed with him, or he was adept at committing inventive fantasies to paper."

At West Point, a slovenly and seemingly undisciplined Cadet Custer proved capable of staving off expulsion with last-minute bursts of study and going for months without a single demerit after approaching the maximum permitted. (Faced with a crucial reexamination, he broke into an instructor's room, but fled before he could copy the relevant questions.) Refreshingly viewing Custer's youth with neither a partisan's indulgence nor a detractor's scorn, Utley sees this academic survival partly as evidence of the good luck—"Custer's Luck"—that would follow him through life, finally becoming "an article of faith in his self-appraisal."

Graduated a year early in 1861 to help crush secession, Custer proved himself a dashing cavalryman and a skilled staff officer. In 1863, at twenty-three, he was given a brigadier's star: at the head of his Michigan Brigade, reddish-gold hair falling almost to his shoulders, the lean, energetic Custer was in his element, often meeting the enemy head-on despite fearful odds. A trooper noted of one engagement that Custer "commanded in person and I saw him plunge his saber into the belly of a rebel who was trying to kill him. You can guess how bravely soldiers fight for such a general." But Utley does not dismiss Custer, who gained a second star and divisional command at twenty-five, as a mere hotspur, and one is glad that his editor requested a chapter on Custer's Civil War exploits—"a virtually faultless record of battlefield success," yet ill-remembered today. The same Indian battle that immortalized him was to make the wartime leader (in Gregory Urwin's phrase) "The Custer America Forgot." Had he fallen at Appomattox, muses Utley, he would have been remembered as a great cavalry general.

But Utley sees Custer's personality as yet unformed, the "essential man" not yet developed or revealed. Peace threatened to "free the boy who had been held in check for two years by the awesome demands of 'Glorious War'—not just the exuberant, fun-loving boy but the immature, foolish boy as well." The huge wartime armies disbanding, Custer reverted to his regular army rank of captain. Far from hastily dedicating himself to a peacetime military career, he explored financial opportunities in the East—and Utley cites evidence of later business dealings dubious by even Gilded Age standards.

Seeking preferment in a shrunken army, Custer acquired the lieutenant-colonelcy (and generally de facto command) of the new Seventh U.S. Cavalry. Early days on the frontier were marked by futile pursuits across Kansas, discoveries of mutilated Indian victims, and fruitless peace parleys that led General Sherman to believe him too trusting of Indians. Frustration and failure apparently plunged Custer into a depression, inspiring him to pick fights with his officers and savagely punish soldiers for minor transgressions: "He is the most complete example of a petty tyrant that I have ever seen," wrote a former admirer. Most surprisingly, Custer had to be prodded

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into taking the field, and Utley suggests that he underwent "what a later generation would call an identity crisis."

Court-martialed for various offenses, including summarily shooting deserters and going AWOL to visit his wife, Custer—"always adept at self-delusion, at reshaping facts and observations to produce pleasing results"—managed to justify all his actions on military grounds. Suspended from rank and pay, he was recalled by General Philip H. Sheridan in 1868 for a risky winter campaign. In a dawn attack against a snowbound Cheyenne Indian village on the Washita River, Custer's men killed headman Black Kettle, burned tepees, and shot hundreds of ponies.

This "Battle of the Washita" was proclaimed both a major victory and a slaughter of "peaceful" Indians. But Utley points out that the peaceably inclined Black Kettle had not restrained his scalp-hungry warriors—and that women and children slain accidentally, or in self-defense, should not be confused with massacre victims. (Perhaps with more justice, Custer was also accused of leaving the field after an inadequate search for a group of missing men under Major Joel Elliott, later found to have been annihilated.) Utley defends attacking without extensive reconnaissance, for this would have risked alerting the Indians when the pressing concern was preventing their escape: even "mediocre" but disciplined soldiers could normally best several times their number of individually superior warriors. Though the story has been stoutly resisted by some Custer partisans, the author plausibly discredits the hero with taking a Cheyenne captive of the battle as his mistress; while the marriage of "Autie" and "Libbie" Custer resists debunking as one of history's great love stories, Utley links periods of apparent strain to "Autie's" infidelities.

Successful if minor fights with Sioux bands in 1873, an 1874 exploratory expedition into the Black Hills of the Dakotas, and his own articles and memoirs (which bore the now-ironic title *My Life on the Plains: or, Personal Experiences with Indians*) helped secure Custer's contemporary renown as frontier soldier—one whose writings reflected an ambiguous, though not unusual, view of the Indian. "Stripped of the beautiful romance" of Cooper's novels, he wrote, "the Indian forfeits his claim to the appellation of *noble* red man." He instead stood revealed as a savage "in every sense of the word . . . one whose cruel and ferocious nature far exceeds that of any wild beast of the desert."

Yet "Custer the romantic," as Utley terms him (in language lifted verbatim from a 1971 magazine piece) found the Indians' ways fascinating, their equestrian and war-like skills admirable. In one famous passage, he asserted: "If I were an Indian, I often think [,] I would greatly prefer to cast my lot among those of my people who adhered to the free open plains, rather than submit to the confined limits of a reservation, there to be the recipient of the blessed benefits of civilization, with its vices thrown in without stint or measure." Yet Custer warned that the Indian could not be given this luxury.

In 1876 Custer was expected to command one of three columns searching for Sioux Indians who had declined reservation benefits and vices. But he was banned from the campaign by a spiteful President Grant for Congressional testimony implicating the Secretary of War (and Grant's worthless brother Orvil) in corruption schemes. At the urging of Generals Sherman, Sheridan, and Alfred Terry, Grant relented to the extent of allowing

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Custer his own regiment. Utley easily dismisses the nonsensical (yet mysteriously popular) theory that an overeager Boy General tried to win a Democratic presidential nomination by trouncing the Indians. But he also disputes the argument that General Terry foresaw a juncture between the Seventh and Colonel John Gibbon's column in order to trap the "hostiles"—and that Custer disobeyed orders by following the Indians' trail after detachment from Terry's force.

Utley instead favors the argument that Custer was expected to find, and fight, the Indians first, citing Major James Brisbin's comment (*prior* to the disaster) that Terry had good reasons for affording Custer "the honor of the attack." The charge that Custer further violated orders by attacking on June 25th, without waiting until the 26th for the alleged Gibbon rendezvous, ignores the difficulty of ascertaining the Indians' precise whereabouts; Terry noted in his "orders" that it was "impossible" to give Custer "any definite instructions," permitting him to deviate from Terry's suggestions if he saw "sufficient reason."

Yet what should Custer have done after his Indian scouts discovered an immense enemy village? "Despite the consequences," writes Utley boldly, "the decision to attack on June 25 was sound." True, Custer, like most of his colleagues, had underestimated his opponents' aggressiveness and fighting spirit, if not their numbers; but Plains Indians attacked in camp usually scattered, and preventing the enemy's escape was considered paramount. Thus, fearing his presence was known, Custer felt obliged to strike immediately rather than lie concealed until dawn. Split into three fighting detachments and a heavily guarded pack train, the Seventh met the warriors piecemeal and was defeated in detail.

But Utley assigns less blame to Custer than to ranking subordinates Major Marcus A. Reno (who led a panicked "charge" *away* from the enemy) and Captain Frederick Benteen, who inexplicably "dawdled" after receiving a message from Custer to join him and ended by linking up with Reno's demoralized command. Under siege throughout June 26th, the Reno-Benteen men were relieved the next day by troops under Terry and Gibbon, who had already found the ghastly wreckage of Custer's five companies. Custer's own body, shot in the head and breast, lay with a small group on a hill, marking the apparent site of a final stand against overwhelming numbers of Sioux and Cheyenne warriors.

In his 1973 *Frontier Regulars* Utley himself, while conceding some mitigating circumstances, had charged Custer with disobedience and "ultimate responsibility" for the disaster. But he now sees Custer's reputation sullied by less competent men, moving quickly to "recompose the history of recent events" and thus conceal other flaws in the campaign's handling. (Of the much-admired General George Crook's conduct, he writes acidly that "one searches in vain for a single decision that Crook made correctly.") Utley suggests several scenarios of how Custer *might* have won, or at least staved off annihilation—and even wonders how a surviving Custer might have defeated the Indians in subsequent actions, as his friend Colonel Nelson A. Miles ultimately did. But his judgment on the battle actually fought is clear:

> George Armstrong Custer does not deserve the indictment that history has imposed on him for his actions at the Little Bighorn. Given what he knew at each decision point and what he had every reason to expect of his subordinates, one is hard pressed to say what he ought to have done differently. . . . In truth, at the Little Bighorn "Custer's Luck" simply ran out. Although the failure of subordinates may have contributed and the strength and prowess of the foe certainly contributed, Custer died the victim less of bad judgment than of bad luck.

Utley employs such important recent scholarship as John S. Manion's monograph indicating that a long-"discredited" 1878 affidavit—quoting Terry as *verbally* giving Custer a free hand—might well be authentic. But the omission of notes, and of any annotation other than a chapter on sources, is crushing given such controversial material—and some minor errors. Custer was *not* the Union army's youngest general. Elliott's party numbered seventeen, not twenty. Cancer of the tongue, not alcohol, cost Major Reno his life. A purported photograph of Lt. William Cooke actually depicts Lt. Henry Nowlan.

Other quibbles are more subjective. Utley may lend too much credence to Indian stories of a curse placed on Custer during a parley and of Cheyenne women poking an awl into his corpse's ears, though he ignores recent

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allegations of an arrow thrust up his penis. He even raises the hoary but unfounded suspicion that at the Union armies' Grand Review, Custer deliberately spurred his mount to gallop flashily past the president's grandstand; the available evidence suggests that the horse simply bolted.

Of such controversies, most of them splendidly trivial, is the story made. In 1983 I saw a tourist enter the Custer Battlefield museum wearing a T-shirt proclaiming "I Have Given Up My Search for Truth and Am Now Looking for a Good Fantasy"; but true buffs cannot admit the sentiment. Never intending to have the last word, Utley admits his failure to resolve the Custer enigma: "No one ever has," he adds, "and I am convinced that no one ever will." Why bother, then? As well ask why Custer savored the chase, or the glitter of naked steel in the sun.

Sudden Wisdom

DISPLACED PERSON: THE TRAVEL ESSAYS OF JOHN CLELLON HOLMES.

REPRESENTATIVE MEN: THE BIOGRAPHICAL ESSAYS OF JOHN CLELLON HOLMES.

PASSIONATE OPINIONS: THE CULTURAL ESSAYS. *By John Clellon Holmes. University of Arkansas Press. $22.95 each. Paper, $12.95 each.*

Reviewed by GAIL REGIER

John Clellon Holmes, who died last year of cancer, was one of the original writers of the Beat movement, as well as a founder of the so-called New Journalism. The author of three respected novels whose milieu is that loose association of voluntary outcasts that would later be called the counterculture, Holmes published no more novels after 1964, although he continued to write the magazine articles by which he had always earned part of his living. Shortly before his death, he selected and edited those essays he wished to preserve, and they are now being issued in three volumes by the University of Arkansas Press. The first volume, *Displaced Person,* is a book of travel writing, including the minibook "Walking Away from the War," Holmes's account of a spiritual journey he made to Europe during the years of the Vietnam War. The second, *Representative Men,* contains sketches of such figures as Jack Kerouac, Jay Landesman, and Nelson Algren. Many of these figures Holmes knew personally, but he concentrates on the ways in which the lives of these men represented—or anticipated—trends of their times. *Passionate Opinions,* the third volume, consists of social and philosophical essays, including Holmes's meditations on the Beat generation.

Although Holmes's work is a part of literary history, some people are troubled that his later career produced no fiction other than a few short stories. The conventional assumption is that a novelist who stops writing novels has lost his touch, but there is in this assumption a kind of snobbery, a caste system of literary genres. Poets and fiction writers, to say nothing of critics, often label as mere "journalists" nonfiction writers who are often their literary betters. One thinks of Aldous Huxley among other novelists who found they could say better in essays what they had tried to say in fiction. That Holmes turned more and more to nonfiction in fact did not even mark a real change of direction. His novels often have the flavor of essays, as his rather intellectual characters debate the ethics of existence, and in his essays he turned more and more to the close point of view that is the legacy of modern fiction. Rereading these essays, one notes how skeptical he was of disembodied abstractions, how trustful of narrative and concrete detail.

Go, Holmes's first novel, has all the energy—and weaknesses—expected of a young man's first book. A roman à clef about John and his wife Shirley living the bohemian life in New York, it is noteworthy as the first description of the Beat subculture and for its sharp-etched portraits of such subsequently famous figures as Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and Neil Cassady. Holmes's second novel, *The Horn,* is shorter and tighter, a fictional exploration of the gritty but spiritual (as Holmes saw them) lives of jazz musicians. All the major characters in the novel are black, and Holmes (who was white) was always proud that many reviewers assumed that the

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author of the book was himself black. *Get Home Free,* his best novel, is a tour de force that includes, among other things, a retelling of *King Lear* featuring an alcoholic ex-harbor pilot as the chief character, and a rambling odyssey through a rural crash pad that at the time must have seemed like a retooling of *Go* and now reads like a prophecy of the sixties.

Although Holmes had been the Beat generation's most articulate spokesman, his reputation was not inflated by the boom in counterculture stock that in the sixties made folk heroes of writers as diverse as Gregory Corso and William Burroughs. From Holmes's work it is easy to see why; Holmes was always less a *Beat* writer than a Beat *writer,* who from the beginning was involved in pointing out the flaws in the philosophy of excess, rather than just cheerleading it on. The John Holmes who wrote that a hot rod driver playing chicken "is affirming the life within him in the only way he knows how, at the extreme," also wrote, "I'd rather stay human than act hip." For all the rhetoric, most of those who strove to be hip in the sixties clung to a narrow party line; as Ken Kesey noted, one was either on the bus or one wasn't, and Holmes was always sitting on the bumper or hood somewhere, scribbling in his journal. When the counterculture he had helped create became fashionable, he was there to cast a cool eye upon it and say what he saw. In 1965, Holmes wrote:

> I have spent evenings in downtown pads that were almost indistinguishable, one from the other (the dart board, the mattresses, the photos of W. C. Fields, the record player on the floor, the copies of *Yugen* and *Evergreen,* the day-old saucepan of spaghetti, the pathetic obscenities in the toilet).... More than likely, I was there with an overweight rich boy from uptown, for whom the bearded painter in jeans, and his anemic wife in a begrimed slip, and the ubiquitous, leotarded extra girl (who was reading a comic book), were pot connections.... Joints went around from hand to hand, and your style in turning-on (mine was considered fortyish) was closely observed and *not* commented on ...; Coltrane skirled on and on (though not too loud), and anyone who tapped his foot was treated to glances of glacial disdain, having, after all, "lost his cool." On most of these evenings, I was successfully incognito simply because I wore a tie.

By 1967, Holmes's tolerance of the hipster crowd was beginning to be edged with irritation:

> Young Americans were everywhere in Europe that year.... They flowed up the stairs to the Money Exchange with their guitars, and skis, and bedrolls. They waited patiently on the teller's line as if they had been queued-up all their lives, each holding the green-and-gold passport and the book of traveller's checks with which America arms even her most defiant children.... They looked around expressionlessly, or laughed their half-derisive, half-bewildered laughter, or merely slumped against their knapsacks. They might have been slouching through Disneyland to be bored.

Holmes has got the kids' number—but even here the satiric edge is smoothed by the good humor of the last line's comic homage to Yeats. All of Holmes's work has this double edge of a sharply critical mind tempered by a warm affection for individual human beings, for the simple world of light and flesh we all live and die in. Sometimes this led him into sentimentality, particularly when he wrote, as he did so often, about his friends. His apologias for Kerouac's alcoholism are today a bit embarrassing to read, and he offers little evidence for the claims of cultural importance he makes for his old *Nuerotica* magazine crowd. But other times he walked the wire of emotion to a high place from which he wrote prose that was as moving as it was penetrating.

Passionate Opinions contains several strong essays on books, films, and music, though "The Golden Age of Jazz," which Holmes announced in 1959, reads oddly in light of the artistic explosion in rock music that followed. But the best essays are about that deep and paradoxical well of mystery—sex—that fascinated John as much as it had two of the writers he most admired, Henry Miller and D. H. Lawrence. In "Revolution Below the Belt," Holmes praises the sexual revolution, yet questions how truly radical its advances are. Sex, formerly justified by the need for children, is now justified as necessary to physical and mental health. We will not achieve a true revolution, Holmes argues, until we cease thinking of sex as something that needs justification, something that is, in itself, somehow dangerous and unclean.

In his introduction to *Passionate Opinions,* Holmes writes that, in assembling the collection, he found that the cultural essays dated in a way that those about people and places did not. Part of the sense of that datedness comes from our own expectations. We take for

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granted that a person or a city changes with the years, and we value descriptions of them partly to the extent that those descriptions fix them in the spotlight of a particular moment. Yet ideas and values also change, and it is useful to be reminded of how they do so. Not simply so we can sneer "How could we have believed *that*?" like so many freshmen laughing at the crude lighting of a twenties film, but because looking at what we have thought gives us a healthy skepticism about what we think now. Particularly valuable in this regard are the essays Holmes wrote at various points in his life about the Beat generation.

By the end of the decade, Holmes's view of the Beats was more analytical, more aesthetic; the essay on the Beats he wrote for *Esquire* talked less about hanging out and more about street poetry and method acting. If he now seemed to exclude the Young Republicans whose dispassionate materialism had once seemed to him Beat, he included the full range of society's outcasts, from the slum hoodlums whose motiveless homicides were "the sort of crime envisaged by the Marquis de Sade a hundred and fifty years ago—a crime which the cruel absence of God made obligatory" to the enlightened hipster for whom "argument, violence, and concern for attachments are ultimately square."

In the sixties, Holmes wrote about the Beat scene in the past tense, having never abandoned his essentially positive position. In "The Game of the Name," he defends the Beats against the criticisms of Norman Podhoretz and Paul Goodman and takes issue with the interpretations of "Beatness" promulgated by Norman Mailer in his essay "The White Negro." Holmes notes, with the barely restrained pride of a quarterback's father, how deeply current trends in the arts seemed to have been shaped by the Beats' explorations, and he retires from the stage like an undefeated prizefighter.

What a writer knows, ultimately, is only himself; and Holmes's essays, for all their range, were relentlessly self-referential. Even when writing on the most "journalistic" subject, his true subject was always himself. His essay on Lee Harvey Oswald, for example, is less about the Warren Report than it is about his own fascination with Oswald's position as the nexus of two dramatically existential murders—a fascination the nation shared. The biographical sketches illuminate the issues addressed in the cultural essays, and the travel pieces are all more about Holmes's discoveries in a place than about the place as such. Holmes maintained certain central beliefs through all changes of intellectual fashion—most important, his conviction that a cultivated, sometimes desperate, openness to new experience was, in our time, a necessary alternative to spiritual death, though unlike many writers, he rarely romanticized the hazards such openness entails.

In this regard, his biographical essays are especially interesting. Holmes chose consistently to write about men who followed their own obsessive concerns despite the world's hostility or indifference—what Alfred Bester, author of the rather Beat 1950s science fiction novel *The Stars My Destination*, calls "tiger men." Even (or especially) when those concerns seem misplaced or destructive, Holmes admires this pursuit of inner truth, but insists that we record its costs. The portraits range from such writers as Kerouac, Ginsberg, Nelson Algren, and Gershon Legman (the folklorist of the erotic whose *Love and Death* was an important wedge under the dam of censorship broken by the sexual revolution) to Jay Landesman, the godfather of camp, and Neil Cassady, the ultimate tiger man Kerouac immortalized in *On the Road*.

"The Gandy Dancer," his essay about Cassady, shows both Holmes's compassion and his critical eye:

> What business did Capote, Mailer, Kerouac, or myself have messing up the lives and fates of the Perry Smiths, the Gary Gilmores, or the Neil Cassadys of the West with our inky and romantic abstractions? They were victims of thirsts that couldn't be slaked, hungers that couldn't be fed by glum America. They lived at variance with its progress, its uniformity, its wealth, and its power. . . .
>
> For Neil was alone. The man died, as he had lived, excluded, exploited, exiled from those lasting satisfactions that lead a man to bed of a night, not out of exhaustion but because he is replete. . . . What we missed was something I'd seen in his face as he stared out that New York window, as if staring down into the iron railyard of his whole life. What I saw was the sad, bewildered aftertaste that comes over all the surfeited Californias of our long tradition of hedonism—in the gloaming, in the end.

Holmes had early embraced the philosophy of sudden wisdom, of a humanism that neither feared nor worshipped the new and the ex-

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treme. All his life he searched, like all serious writers, for the rock beneath the sand—not expecting to find it. "A crippling draught always awakens dreams of the Flood," he wrote, "and in a flood nothing is saved but the barest essentials." He addressed questions that we can never answer, but can't shake off: What things in this life are essential? How shall we find them?

One Type of Ambiguity

AN APPETITE FOR POETRY. *By Frank Kermode. Harvard University Press. $22.50.*

Reviewed by HAROLD FROMM

It may just be possible that "literature" is getting ready to come out of the closet where it has been held prisoner by "theory" for the past decade or more. In fact, one theory-jaded critic after another has recently been letting on to a sneaking fondness for this disparaged and controlled substance. Is it possible that receptivity to aesthetic enjoyment will soon become respectable and "literature" once again be legalized? For despite all the patriarchy-bashing tunes that keep blaring from academic jukeboxes, critical theory has been nothing less than a will-to-power, an attempt to master "the text," to wrestle it down to the mat and kick it where it is vulnerable. It is an institutionally condoned expression of contempt for the very poets and novelists who provide literary academics with their daily bread.

This growing change—or admission—of heart can be seen in the prologue to Frank Kermode's new collection of essays, *An Appetite for Poetry,* an expression borrowed here from Valéry but also used as a recurrent motif by the poet (and professor) Robert Pinsky in his own recent collection of critical essays, *Poetry and the World.* When academics start talking once again about appetite in connection with the arts, we've come a long way, baby, indeed.

An erudite, widely read scholar-critic with theoretical leanings, Frank Kermode has always been engaged in a psychological struggle with an interiorized, aesthetically disposed Man of Letters who is itching to get out. If being a Man of Letters had not been considered so infra dig for all these post-modern years, he might very well have emerged earlier from Kermode's repressed. But now that Kermode has finally acted out a series of flirtations with semiotics, historicism, structuralism, canons, and all the other fashionable whatnots of theory, he seems ready to confess to a certain weariness about it all, a willingness to have another go at "literature." After reviewing some of these earlier interests in his prologue, he writes:

> The purpose of these remarks is not advertisement or autobiography; I am only trying to suggest that some enduring preoccupations are reflected in parts of the present book, and also that since they differ so sharply from what is becoming [has become?] the received wisdom I ought to deal more expressly with this conflict in these introductory remarks. Indeed, given the present critical climate, I almost feel it necessary to explain why other parts of the book show no interest in these fashionable problems, being about literature and not about theory.

Although not as purely literary or hermeneutical as this remark may suggest, these "enduring preoccupations" of the book's essays come closer to literary, historical, philosophical, rhetorical, and psychological interests than to what passes today for theory. And in an implied response to such theorists as Barbara Herrnstein Smith, who have been writing about the "contingencies of value," he remarks, "It is not really possible for me . . . to think that the values we give to (or, more boldly, that we *recognize* in) *Hamlet* or *Coriolanus* or the 'Horation Ode' (considered, of course, as works, totalities, not simply stretches of text) are the product simply of our own brainwashed responses. They are instances of literary value." This for a contemporary professor of English is daring enough, but Kermode does not stop here. "And there might be other occasions to speak about literature without first asking at length what it is to speak about literature, or whether there is really such a thing to speak about. There are specialist audiences, audiences of specialists in fields other than literature, and audiences not properly specialist at all; and to speak

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✪ HAROLD FROMM has written for the *Hudson Review,* the *Virginia Quarterly Review,* and the *Georgia Review.*

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sensibly to all such audiences remains, I think, the normal obligation of the professional critic." He adds: "Few people can take much pleasure in modern academic literary criticism except its practitioners, who do not mind that an intelligent outsider would surely find it both arcane and depressing." These—again for a contemporary academic—are fighting words, and Kermode maintains this offensive in order to place the essays that will follow. He complains about academic entrepreneurialism, about the new-establishment view that the traditional canon consists of vehicles of oppression by white males, and about the soothing belief that critical theory is in actuality an agent of political reform in the world, "a claim so fantastically inflated that it belongs not to the real world but to carnival." Kermode, for example, notes: "[Jonathan] Culler, for one, believes that theory will do good to suffering minorities. The days when the editors of *Tel Quel* supposed they could help with the revolution by turning up at the Renault factory and reading their pieces to the workers over lunch are presumably over."

Kermode's long-standing "conflict," to use his own word, is a perennially unsettling feature of his writings, a dividedness between the wide-ranging interests of a somewhat theoretical scholar-critic and the aesthetic, craftsmanlike belletrist of the Man of Letters. As a result of this conflict, his writings are often disappointing, either as scholarship/theory or as literary artifacts, being too fanciful and "creative" to be believable as accounts of "the facts" and too self-indulgently erudite to produce entirely pleasing experiences as literary art. This conflict is cripplingly present in two of his most well-known books, *The Sense of an Ending* and *The Genesis of Secrecy*. Both works depend very heavily on a handful of words or motifs used in a liturgical, incantatory way, as a sort of thematic glue to hold his theories together. In the former, such words as "kronos" and "kairos" and "in the middest" are repeated more times than you can believe, while in the latter, "hina" and "hoti" are ridden to distraction. This fondness for the ambience of Greek, Middle English, and foreignisms in general is characteristic of Kermode's aesthetic, shaping, "literary" vein, but the effect, far from being overarchingly Wagnerian, can be harmful to the credibility of the ideas being pushed by the scholarship. The more he repeats them, the less inclined some

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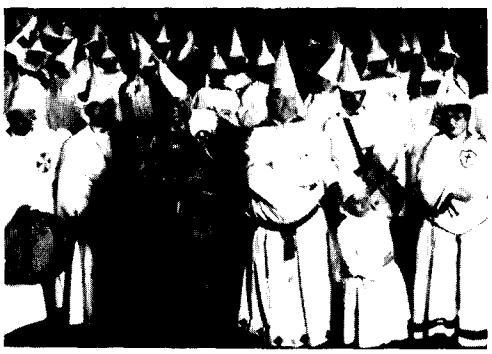

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readers may be to accept the total scholarly package, which can seem bogus and factitious, too dependent on literary whistling in the dark. This is not to suggest that scholarly writing cannot or ought not to be graceful and pleasing, but that Kermode's attempts at global theories, weak and filled with his own conflicts to begin with, are not strengthened by literary techniques that are admirable in themselves when the occasions are appropriate.

Kermode's "conflict," if I may float a theory of my own, appears to be a product of his profound intellectual and institutional skepticism as it works itself out through the media of scholarship and essay writing. Kermode is a damaged child of an age of disbelief, whose writings seem to be expressions of desperation: a non-believer's need to believe, if only for a day, some system or structure (semiotics, canon formation, and the rest) that will serve to foster both practical action in the world and professional stature in the university. This whistling in the dark leads him through the kaleidoscopic theoretical fashions of his times. But unfortunately the strength derived from these fabrications seems very short-lived and even at its most puissant it does not really hoodwink their author, whose writings are sprinkled with disclaimers at the very moments of assertion.

Such a conflict—a skeptical sensibility caught between the poles of scholarship and aesthetics, theory and belles lettres—is demonstrated anew in the ten essays that form the chapters of *An Appetite for Poetry*, ranging from "Milton in Old Age," which is quite brilliant, to "Wallace Stevens: Dwelling Poetically in Connecticut," which is quite hopeless. In between is a piece, "The Common Reader," which explains that this obsolescent animal is no longer the man in the street but now takes the form of academics and their students reading the London and New York reviews of books. This means, as Kermode intimates in his prologue, that academics who write have an obligation to take reviewing seriously, especially in the more generalized intellectual journals. There is also a provocative essay, "T. S. Eliot: The Last Classic," setting forth the radical alteration of the world since the time of Eliot's flourishing. "Freud and Interpretation," a richly allusive account of a shift in hermeneutics, suggests how psychoanalysis participated in a movement away from treating writings as part of a historical evolution (that is, diachronically) to treating writings as reconstructed wholly in the present out of historical materials that cannot be acquired "in themselves" but only through a present-day consciousness (that is, synchronically). In this view, psychoanalysis is fully synchronic insofar as "historical truth, or the appearance of it, is entirely the product of the analytical session." Here, Kermode pulls together Saussure, biblical studies, and psychoanalysis to produce a plausible account of today's hermeneutic assumptions. The concluding three essays, however, deal very unevenly with Kermode's recent excursions into biblical studies, full of interesting moments but too weighted down by scholarly baggage and fussy speculations to which one is not quite ready to give assent.

The essay on Milton, executed with learned ease, is not without the usual Kermodian dividedness, for the sympathetic account of Milton's life and work is studded with little jabs of satire produced, in the old familiar mode, by repeating quoted phrases in new contexts that change their tone and import and turn them against their author. Beginning with a brief sketch of Milton's years of service to Cromwell's regime and the accident of fate that resulted in his being forced to beg the pardon of Charles II, Kermode moves on to his main interest, *Samson Agonistes*, in order to show the parallel between Milton's and Samson's relationships to God and the state. In a cunning move, he introduces Freud's Schreber case, that "classic study of paranoia," describing and quoting Schreber's sense of both election and punishment. "I mention the Schreber case," he concludes, "not to suggest that Milton was paranoid; but simply because it offers another famous instance of the human imagination at work on the questions of election and suffering and the divine plot." And then, disclaimers not withstanding, he whips out a stiletto: "There does seem to be a measure of similarity," Kermode writes, "between the delusional systems of paranoia and tragic plots." Such shifting—should I say "shiftiness"?—of viewpoint is what finally consummates this rich and multivalent essay by leaving open to question the complexities of Milton's mind and art.

After a performance as dexterous as this one, the ensuing essay, "Wallace Stevens: Dwelling Poetically in Connecticut," seems like the retribution of a whimsical and mali-

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cious deity. All of the devices, repetitions of phrases, and thematic ironies that worked so well in the handling of Milton, are exposed as mere machinery, when, as here, they succeed in calling attention only to their own whirrings. Although Kermode is certain that Stevens never read Heidegger, he persistently associates him with Heidegger via Hölderlin (with whom Stevens *was* familiar), starting with the ironic title's "dwelling," a favorite word of both German writers. Weaving together (as he did for Milton) poems, prose, autobiography, and essays, Kermode keeps intimating some essential interior connection between these three writers, although the evidence that he offers is of the kind that could equally be seen as true or false, consisting of fairly general philosophic ideas about art and death.

What produced insight in the Milton essay verges on preciosity in this one as the repetitions and ironies begin to grate. Nor is the Heideggerian razzmatazz much help: "Being understands its own death authentically not by avoiding that dread out of which courage must come but by accepting it as essential to Being's everydayness, which otherwise conceals the fact that the end is imminent at every moment." The characteristically Kermodian skepticism, however, ultimately undermines the shaky (however erudite) edifice he has created: "So one forces them together, Hölderlin-Heidegger in Freiburg or Fribourg, and Stevens in Hartford. But Stevens always draws back, as if to examine a binding or to keep some distance between himself and a mad poet or a very difficult philosopher." Was it all worth it?

What this often impressive, sometimes strained, collection of essays suggests is that the trendiness of which Kermode is often accused is a reflection of the need by a serious philosophical and literary intelligence to find plausible schemata in which to express itself in an age of personal unbelief and institutional flux. Such a view would account not so much for a half-baked as for an overcooked quality of so much of Kermode's writing. When the writing fails, one has a sense of virtuosity gone sour and astray. Given Kermode's explicit reaffirmation of the value of "literature," perhaps he will come to find it less necessary to compromise his art for the sake of a professional bravura that—despite its contribution to his academic eminence—has not served him well.

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Learning To Be Human

THE VOICE OF LIBERAL LEARNING: MICHAEL OAKESHOTT ON EDUCATION. *Edited by Timothy Fuller. Yale University Press. $20.*

Reviewed by D. G. MYERS

"No small part of the native genius of a philosopher," Michael Oakeshott once remarked, "lies in the perception of where in the world of contemporary speculation is the point from which advance may best be made." Nearly four decades before Allan Bloom, E. D. Hirsch, Jr., and *A Nation at Risk* made an issue out of educational reform, Oakeshott perceived that any coherent understanding of education was in danger of being lost in a confusion over its true character. Beginning in the late 1940s with his essay "The Universities" in the *Cambridge Journal*—a short-lived British counterpart of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR—Oakeshott undertook to defend the unfashionable idea of liberal education. And he did so, not by hotly animadverting upon illiberal currents in education, but (to use his own phrase) by doubling back to retrieve the liberal conception implicit within the educational traditions of the West. As he saw it, his task was to embark upon an inquiry into the nature and circumstance of education, for he discerned—and this was no small part of his genius—that serious thought had rarely been given to the question of what it means for humans to learn. With the exception of Dewey, then, to whom he emerges as a rival, it may be said that no other twentieth-century philosopher of equal abilities has examined the problem of education as closely, or understood it as deeply, as Oakeshott.

Michael Oakeshott is best known as a political philosopher, but his writing on politics and other subjects (whatever else it is) is a philosophy. Yet because of his reputation as a political philosopher, and because he is sometimes dismissed (by those who know little of his work) as merely an apologist for British neo-conservatism, Oakeshott's influence has been more limited than it deserves to be. There are signs, however, of a reawakening of interest in Oakeshott. His first book, *Experience and Its Modes* (1933), once virtually unobtainable, was finally issued in paperback by Cambridge University Press in 1985. A new and expanded edition of his essays *Rationalism in Politics* (originally published in 1962) is scheduled for release this year by Liberty Press. Now *The Voice of Liberal Learning* gathers two-and-a-half decades of his reflections upon education—some of the best work of Oakeshott's later years, much of which was tucked away in hard-to-find journals and specialized collections by diverse hands. The editor of the volume, Professor Timothy Fuller of Colorado College, is owed a debt of gratitude by all students of Oakeshott for salvaging these six important essays and bringing them together in one place. He has also provided a useful introduction to Oakeshott's thought.

Education occupies a central place in Oakeshott's philosophy, because he views it as a consequence of freedom. Oakeshott is firm in his conviction that the modern revivals of predestinarianism, from Freud's doctrine of the unconscious and the "ideology" of neo-Marxism to the evolutionary determinism of sociobiology, cannot coherently account for why humans are able to do *this* rather than *that*. The formulation of these creeds denies the very thing they seem to be saying, for each "postulates a man who is something besides what these, or any other such statements, allege him to be." What is left out of account is the human self-understanding these various doctrines claim to be expressing. Man is endowed with a freedom that is *exercised* in any effort to explain his freedom away: he is free to understand himself in any manner he chooses. But if this is true, then the only way a man can come to understand himself in one manner instead of another is by learning to do so.

For Oakeshott, then, education is an initiation into the inheritance of human self-understandings. It is "learning to perform humanly." It is indeed learning to *become* human, for no one is born knowing how. "The ancient Greek exhortation, Know Thyself, meant *learn* to know thyself. It was not an exhortation to buy a book on psychology and study it; it meant, contemplate and learn from what men, from time to time, have made of this engagement of learning to be a man."

Several conclusions follow from this showing of what it means to learn. First, education

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is not the engagement of learning how to think; men do not think about nothing in particular; it is learning "to think with an appreciation of the considerations which belong to different modes of thought." It is the study of literature and philosophy and history, not as what are now scorned as canons of texts, but as the different approaches to thinking about human experience that are intimated by those texts. Although he has nothing to say about them, Oakeshott would almost certainly reject interdisciplinary studies as a corruption of the engagement to learn. They are training in a noisy set of doctrines, in the modish and the dominant. A teacher, Oakeshott says, "may be excused if he finds the present dominant image of civilized life too disagreeable to impart with any enthusiasm to his pupils." He would not agree with Catherine R. Stimpson, president of the Modern Language Association of America, when she says it is "intellectual malpractice" not to teach women's contributions to history and literature. For Oakeshott, there is but one form of intellectual malpractice: to go on teaching while having "no confidence in any of the standards of worth written into [the] inheritance of human achievement."

Secondly, it follows that education is a "conversation" among the different "voices" in which an understanding of human life is expressed. Learning to be human (on this showing) is learning to participate in the conversation of mankind. Nothing in Oakeshott's philosophy is more profound than this conception of human experience as a conversation, and nothing in the recent history of philosophy is sadder than its vulgarization at the hands of Richard Rorty in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979). It is usual now, when the notion of conversation is invoked, to attribute it to Rorty rather than Oakeshott—and it is probably just as well, since it is the vulgarized notion that is usually invoked. Rorty himself acknowledged Oakeshott but misinterpreted him. In Rorty, man's conversation occurs between different "social practices" by which claims to knowledge are justified but never finally substantiated. In short, "conversation" becomes just another word for cultural relativism.

Nothing could be further from Oakeshott's philosophy. For Oakeshott, the different

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voices of man's conversation are not "social practices," the plangent, disputatious claims of which can never be settled; they are *themselves* the practice of our society. To learn to distinguish and perhaps even to speak in the voices of literature and philosophy and history—this is what enables a man to engage in social practices. "To make one's own thought clear and to attend to what passes before one," Michael Oakeshott says, "is indistinguishable from participating in and handling the civilized inheritance of our society." It is difficult to think of a writer better equipped to handle our inheritance, or a voice more civilized.

Big Picture Man

ARNOLD J. TOYNBEE: A LIFE. *By William H. McNeill. Oxford University Press. $24.95.*

Reviewed by RICHARD JENKYNS

Arnold Toynbee's name was famous even before he was born. The first Arnold Toynbee, uncle of the historian, had been an economist and progressive thinker who died young in 1883, leaving behind him a reputation for intellect, social conscience, and charm of personality. From one point of view the nephew may seem, like the hero of his last major work, the Byzantine emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus, to have been born to the purple. His education, as a scholar of Winchester College and Balliol College, Oxford, was at the pinnacle of England's elite, and early gave him "access to the seats of the mighty," in Professor McNeill's own phrase.

To outward appearance at least, Arnold Toynbee's career was one of unbroken success. At Oxford he read Greats, the school of classics, and his first job was as a tutor in ancient history at Balliol; but with the effortless superiority that Greats and Balliol were alleged to inculcate, he came forward as an authority on one field after another. Before he had reached thirty, he was at the Versailles peace conference as an expert on the Muslims and the Middle East (far from being overawed, he bore Lloyd George a grudge for not deferring obediently to his advice); a few months later, he was occupying a chair of Byzantine and modern Greek history at the University of London. Five years after this he moved to another chair, soon to be combined with the directorate of studies at Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs, from where he produced the huge annual surveys that established him as the leading authority on international politics.

The twelve volumes of Toynbee's *Study of History* spread themselves over every age and continent; "an immortal masterpiece," declared the reviewers, and "probably the greatest historical work ever written." He declined a knighthood and the Regius Chair of History at Cambridge. In later life he played the part of sage and savant around the world; when his reputation in America, at one time higher than it ever became in Britain, began to decline, Japan welcomed him as a wise man from the West. His productivity was extraordinary; McNeill claims that the Oxford University Press adopted a policy of publishing no more than four of his books a year.

It was not as effortless as it seemed. Toynbee's parents were short of money and had to struggle to keep up the appearance of gentility. His father went mad and spent the last thirty years of his life in an asylum. His education was made possible only by the scholarships that he won. He seems to have been a rather solitary child who did not make friends easily and plunged himself into work as a consolation and distraction. "As for Ambition, with a great screaming A," he wrote while still an undergraduate, "I have got it pretty strong. . . . I want to be a great gigantic historian—not for fame but because there is lots of work in the world to be done, and I am greedy for as big a share of it as I can get." It is plausible to see, as McNeill does, a motive force for Toynbee's formidable drive in an explosive combination of great expectations with a youth spent amid the dread of becoming déclassé; his work required both the inherited self-confidence of an elite education and a furious will to succeed. He told a friend that he hoped "to be in general au fait and superior and intolerable." The tone of humorous self-deprecation does not disguise the sincerity of the sentiment.

McNeill suggests that he always preserved

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the tone of his Edwardian youth: his courtesy and outward modesty rested on the quiet expectation that others would defer to him. As for his intellectual formation, we might perhaps look a little further back and see him, though a grandee of the progressive academic establishment, as one of the last Victorians. The nineteenth century sees the historian as sage, as prophet, and as system maker. Carlyle dared to range from Odin to Napoléon in vatic prose; such men could accept the universe readily enough because they were confident that they could explain it. Marx trusted his system sufficiently to predict the future from it, with effects incurably wounding to his reputation. The triumphs of natural science encouraged workers in other intellectual fields to search for laws of a quasi-scientific pattern. At the time that Toynbee was a boy, scientists themselves were inclined to suppose that their task was nearly done and nature's workings almost completely understood. Against such a background it becomes easier to see how *A Study of History* came to be conceived. And one may venture the mild paradox that it was as a kind of Victorian Englishman that Toynbee was so well suited to become a guru in post-war America. Henry Luce took him up, and, when Luce's *Time* magazine ran a cover story on him, Whittaker Chambers, who was assigned to work on it, was delighted, as a renegade Marxist, to conclude that Toynbee had supplanted Marx as the guide to man's past and future destiny. How welcome to find a prophet in an age when prophecy had seemed to be no more. Presumably Toynbee was done no harm by his flattering expectation of a coming world empire, probably under American domination. This, too, reads rather like the Victorian faith in the special destiny of the Anglo-Saxon race and its empire, adapted to changed circumstances.

Empires had an abiding fascination for Toynbee. At the age of fourteen we find him drawing a book of maps delineating the empires of Alexander, Rome, and Byzantium and the partition of Africa among the European powers. It seems likely enough that, as McNeill argues, his interest in studying how civilizations decayed grew out of the Edwardians' fear that their empire was threatened by decline at home and the rise of rival powers

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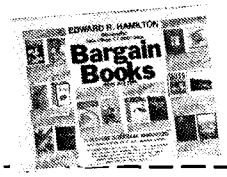

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abroad. Spengler was of course another influence, though Toynbee thought him too dogmatic and deterministic—charges later to be brought against himself. McNeill believes that the central idea that Toynbee got from Spengler was also his greatest mistake: the idea that "civilizations were essentially separate and in normal circumstances were incapable of meaningful communication." This notion, too, deriving from a belief in the rooted identity of the *Volk*, seems firmly grounded in the nineteenth century. In the *Study of History* Toynbee speaks of a "law of civilisations moving forward" towards "the goal of human endeavors: the mutation of Man into Superman"—an odd mixture of Whiggery and Nietzsche.

It is not merely that Toynbee thought world empires to be an inevitable stage in the pathology of civilizations; they excited him. In the thirties he expected the world empire to be German or Russian; in the forties, American. After the Second World War he advocated the establishment of world government, which seems almost childishly utopian. An oligarchy with an enlightened self-interest was the best form of government, he told Gilbert Murray, and, since that was no longer attainable, benevolent despotism was the best hope for the mass of mankind. "As a good classicist and cultivated Englishman, he distrusted democracy," McNeill comments—a remark that might itself provoke some equally broad generalization about American prejudices. Most English classicists saw Philip of Macedon's conquest of the Greek city-states, above all democratic Athens, as a tragedy; Toynbee viewed it with complacency. His attitude seems more Germanic than English; but perhaps it was merely an idiosyncrasy. Anyone who would be a prophet gives hostages to fortune, and in 1990 it is cheap wisdom to say that the era of superpowers is likely to prove transitory. But we may ask whether even forty years ago Toynbee would have predicted a single world empire if part of him had not been fascinated by the prospect.

McNeill's book does not on the whole present Toynbee's character in a very attractive light. Toynbee was too absorbed in his own concerns to give attention to his family, and his sons came to feel that children were to him a nuisance, an expense, and a distraction from work. He claimed to be bitterly disappointed that he had been declared unfit to fight in the First World War, but, when a doctor did pass him for service, he quickly looked for another to reverse the judgment. He and his wife's declaration of socialist principles did not prevent them from working to wheedle an annual income out of her despotic grandmother, the Countess of Carlisle (his life's work was Victorian, once more, in the independence from ordinary academic duties that it required); they also hoped to maneuver her into disinheriting her sons and leaving them the Carlisles' spectacular country house, Castle Howard. Behind Toynbee's modest demeanor lay some vanity: when made a Companion of Honour, a reasonably high distinction, he was sore at not having been offered the grander Order of Merit. In a poem, he compared himself to Thucydides and Dante. He was obsessed with fears about money—his wife suggested a psychiatrist at one stage—and offended some of his hosts in American universities by the avidity with which he squeezed them for fees.

But Toynbee cannot be dismissed as a cold fish, if only because of his love for his first wife Rosalind, daughter of the Hellenist Gilbert Murray. This passion clouded much of his life. Even if she was not, as her son Philip claimed, "a very wicked woman," she was monumentally tiresome. In youth she took up fox hunting, mainly to annoy her progressive, high-thinking parents. During her engagement she drafted a novel in which Toynbee appeared as the ineffectual don Freddy Furze. When he began work on the *Study of History*, she christened it "the Nonsense Book." She was one of those who use religion as a form of moral one-upmanship; such people are often drawn to Roman Catholicism, to that church's misfortune, and so it was in her case. Her conversion enabled her to launch a patronizing attack on her father, in a book called *The Good Pagan's Failure*. Nastiest of all, when it suited her to desert her husband, she was able to use Roman Catholic doctrine to persuade herself that her marriage had probably not been valid and it was God's will that they should separate. She was violently hostile to sexual irregularity in others, which did not deter her from taking a lover in her later years; it was blackly appropriate that in doing so she chose a Dominican friar. Though she sounds unlovable, it is plain that Toynbee loved her deeply; the grief and guilt that he felt at her loss do him honor and make the most moving part of his story.

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Rosalind Toynbee's conversion had some influence on Toynbee's own spiritual development. For a time he flirted with Catholicism, before falling back on a soft-centered syncretism. His attempt to have religion without dogma seems one more Victorian note, taking us back to Mill, George Eliot, and Matthew Arnold. His religiosity has seemed risible to many of his critics, but it may more charitably be seen as an honorable effort to cope with the nemesis of faith. Still, there was surely an element of self-importance in his mystic visions of the past—not vouchsafed to ordinary historians—and encounters with the Being at the heart of the universe. In McNeill's words, he felt these to be "part of a long tradition of God's self-revelation to specially sensitive individuals." One is reminded of the mystic experiences recorded in the autobiography of Kenneth Clark (also of Winchester and Oxford): spiritually as well as aesthetically, everything is to be of the very highest quality.

A more gossipy writer than McNeill would have devoted more space to the checkered lives of Rosalind and her children. As it is, the narrative is not always exciting ("The only important episode for Toynbee in the first decade of his retirement was a prostate operation. . ."). McNeill is fluent, sensible, and fair-minded—and indeed so far from hagiography that one wonders if a kinder portrait might not have been possible. A principal aim of his book, he tells us, is "to try to establish a better balance between the popular adulation on the one hand and the professional hostility on the other that closed in on Toynbee after the mid-1950s." But the effect is oddly muffled, as though the author has lost heart halfway through. He has set himself a large task, no doubt: the sea of faith, in historical systems as in religious, is no longer at the full, and to the academic world Toynbee's work has come to look like a whale stranded helplessly on the shore after the tide has gone out. Pieter Geyl, Richard Pares, A. J. P. Taylor, Hugh Trevor-Roper—all have stuck their spears into the blubber. Can it float again?

One obstacle to Toynbee's restoration to popular fame is not mentioned by McNeill: that he is rather a dull writer. *Hannibal's Legacy*, the most important work of his later years, is a valuable contribution to its subject, and should probably have been more used by Roman historians than it has been; but it is so intolerably prolix, even after the cuts demanded by the publisher, that its neglect is not surprising. Another problem is that his boyish enthusiasm for wide-ranging ideas—not matched, alas, by a youthful style—can topple over into a kind of naïveté. Take his last book, *The Greeks and Their Heritages* (left out of McNeill's biography and apparently unknown to him). The first two paragraphs deal with the nature of human societies, modern cosmological theory about the origins of the universe, and the question of whether God exists. Then the third paragraph begins, "Heritage is karma. This is a Sanskrit word whose literal meaning. . . ." The octogenarian historian emerges, to our surprise, as a sort of hugely clever schoolboy, a voracious reader who cannot resist piling in all he knows. The undergraduate in Toynbee, screamingly ambitious to write great gigantic history, endured to the end.

No one should deny Toynbee vast erudition, energy, and ambition. No doubt it is better to be a whale than a minnow. But he is charged with being a mixture of Procrustes and wool; only a professional historian can answer that charge, and not by offering more wool: we need a more rigorous defense than McNeill's few generalizations. We are told that Toynbee's significance lies in broadening sympathy and expanding the range of historical consciousness, but that in itself is hardly more than the achievement of a publicist. We are told that his history was essentially poetic and intuitive, but that is scarcely a virtue if the intuitions are wrong. Ever fair-minded, McNeill has plenty of specific faults to find in Toynbee's work; it is a pity that he has not given us more specific examples of his virtues to redress the balance. Instead we end with a cloudy peroration, in which McNeill tries matching his subject with "some of the greatest writers of the Western tradition": Milton, Dante, Herodotus, Thucydides. "First let me propose that as Herodotus was to Homer, Toynbee was to Milton. The fit is uncannily exact." McNeill describes this as a "truly Toynbeean comparison." Unfortunately, he may be right.

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The Reader Replies

Fields of Broken Dreams

George V. Higgins's discourse on the decline of baseball (THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, Spring 1990) should have a salubrious effect on the illusory patina that encircles the contemporaneousness of our national sport. Certainly Pete Rose's insouciance in the context of illegality stemming from his involvement in games of chance obviates his rejection as a Hall of Fame postulant.

Mr. Higgins was appropriately cautious in articulating any encomiums that might detract from an exigent legal predicament for Mr. Rose.

Mr. Higgins's essay resonates with the authenticity of a true believer.

BURLING LOWREY
Washington, D.C.

George V. Higgins is right when he says there's no romance left in baseball. There's not much romance left in the law either. Certainly it's not the law George and I practiced, way back then, when all lawyers were gentlemen and checks were not suspended "in the mail"; telephone calls were promptly returned; and letters answered often the day received. I'm sure Raditz of the Red Sox is right when he says baseball today is not the same baseball as when *he* played; it never is; but the same holds true for the law, or farming, or what have you.

And as to Higgins's contention that league expansion has diluted player quality, nonsense. Higgins has chosen to completely ignore the fact that just forty years ago, baseball was a game for white men only. Now the talent pool has been filled by very capable blacks and Hispanics who never had a chance in the days of romance.

And he's also wrong about the demise of the minor leagues. They are not gone because their players have been prematurely promoted to the major leagues; they are gone because today, and for some time past, one can see far better ball right in one's own living room, even if the living room is in the middle of Iowa. Although, even as we speak, minor league team numbers and attendance are increasing slightly, whatever that means.

Baseball has been a business for more than one hundred years with just about everything that being in that category means. The romance may be gone, but I'm, more or less, willing to trade it for the close-ups, the instant replays, the slow motion, and all the other TV gimmicks that let me really see the wonderful skill of The Game.

HENRY D. BLUMBERG
New York, New York

The Great War

As a World War II veteran who shed a considerable amount of blood for his country, I'd like to comment on Dan Pinck's derisive review of Paul Fussell's *Wartime*, which appeared in the Spring 1990 issue.

Few of us who suffered in the foxholes were concerned with the high-minded ideals that put us there; our thoughts were on how to survive . . . 1,440 minutes of every day. Had anyone in my squad been asked why he was at the front, he'd have answered, "Because my goddamned draft board put me here." Pinck sees many things in World War II that just weren't there. It was a war that had to be fought and had to be won, but it was still a war with all the madness, terror, exhaustion, fear, blood, and violent death. What are Pinck's credentials and where was he during the war?

Pinck says the best books about the war "were produced by the Office of Military History." Maybe. If this is true, it only points out the incompetence of many American historians who have written about the war. The Office's history is a hodge-podge of some seventy-plus volumes, some good, many bad. The thirty-year attempt to give the Italian Campaign a history is a beautiful example of how *not* to write history.

Pinck tells us *Wartime* is a "Gatling gun aimed at just about every *good feeling* and *action* that produced an Allied victory in the Second World War." This citizen spent ten months of combat in a rifle company, pushing through the mountains of Italy. If there were any good feelings and good actions associated with those ten months of insanity, I've forgotten them. Pinck also thinks—and this underlies much of his shock—that the war either *was* or *should have been* fought because of the Nazi persecution of the Jews. It was not. It was fought because the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor.

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It is interesting to note that *Wartime*'s severest critics are men who have never been near a combat zone.

ROY LIVENGOOD, Editor
"The Powder River Journal"
91st Infantry Division Association
Salina, Kansas

DAN PINCK replies: Perish the thought that only those men and women who serve on the frontline in combat are qualified to write critically about war or to criticize articles and books written by combatants. Some of the most pernicious junk of the century has been written by men who served, or were wounded, on the frontline; and much of it has been admirably criticized by persons who wouldn't know a howitzer from a stinger or a brigade from a battalion. Combat experience may count for little; intelligence and a historical frame of reference may count for a lot. There is not necessarily any correlation between writing well about war and active participation in it. If there were, Mr. Fussell's book would be better than it is.

I commend Mr. Livengood for his ten months of combat in Italy. I did not serve in the frontlines during the Second World War. I served behind them, as an agent in the Office of Strategic Services. My colleagues, when captured, were either shot on the spot or buried alive. There was a price on my head, fortunately never collected. None of us damned our draft boards for sending us where we were; all of us volunteered to enter the OSS and all of us volunteered to serve behind enemy lines. Maybe those of us who volunteered had a different view from those who were drafted. Still, I don't disagree with Mr. Livengood that war is hell and full of pain and blood and insanity. I just think Mr. Fussell's book isn't as good as it should be.

Robert Maynard Hutchins

In his excellent memoir in your Spring 1990 issue, "Robert Maynard Hutchins," Edward Shils has provided a revealing eyewitness account of the "Great Chicago Fight" that marked Hutchins's tenure on the Midway.

The genuine educational issues he addressed, Mr. Shils found, were "overlaid and obscured by the spurious issues of Aristotelean and Thomistic philosophy versus secularism, 'intellectualism' versus pragmatism, and 'great books' versus textbooks. Before long the spurious issues crowded out the genuine issues." In my biography of Hutchins, *Unseasonable Truths*, I have recounted how the controversy spread throughout the academy, with Hutchins and John Dewey cast as the principal antagonists in a putative contest between the liberal arts and the scientific method.

In the course of that ideological extravaganza Hutchins was often charged with intent to impose elitist, therefore un-American tenets upon the higher learning. Mr. Shils's observations effectively refute the imputation. Although he disagreed with some of Hutchins's ideas, he regarded him as one of the great American university presidents—"a good citizen and a patriot . . . a man of honor [who] tried to live up to his convictions, which he never hid.

Mr. Shils's reservations about Hutchins's approach to academic matters are those of a scholar who has earned high rank in his own discipline: "Methodical research, historical research, the scholarly editing of texts, the writing of biographies, sociological studies, etymology—all these activities of the natural and social sciences and of the humanistic disciplines were not activities which greatly interested Hutchins."

Hutchins would not have disputed the judgment. He identified himself, not as a scholar, but as an educational administrator. What did greatly interest him was the possibility of restoring the classic function of the university as a community of scholars charged with providing students a broad education in the liberal arts. This did not preclude the conventional activities of the university's graduate schools, but it did require redress of the imbalance between research and teaching that had developed under the pressures of an increasingly materialistic age.

He is remembered primarily for his insistence that all undergraduates should follow a course of study based on classic texts that traced the development of the values presumed to have shaped western civilization. Although such concentration on what were generally accepted as great books never gained widespread support, the idea of a core liberal arts curriculum did survive, and is again on the agenda at such bellwether institutions as Harvard.

But the first lesson to be drawn from Hutchins's experience at Chicago is that it is not possible to emphasize broad-based general education in what Clark Kerr called the "multiversity" without fundamental change in its internal structure. "We are encumbered by an academic organization appropriate to Amherst in the '90s and altogether unworkable in a university of the size and complexity of this one," Hutchins pointed out in a 1944 address to his faculty and trustees.

By sheer strength of will and personality he managed to overcome resistance to a formula that established independent examiners to determine an undergraduate's placement and progress on the basis of demonstrated mastery of subject matter. This allowed students to enter the university at any age and move ahead at their own pace. Required

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reading was set forth in syllabuses prepared for broad survey courses covered principally in seminars conducted by full-time teachers. The college was provided with an independent faculty accorded equal status with those in the graduate and professional schools. Rank and compensation were based on teaching ability, rather than the specialized research and publication that had become the primary means of determining merit among those appointed to departments organized around academic disciplines.

The "Hutchins college" thrived as long as he was around to protect it. The controversy that attended it generated an intellectual ferment on campus that left a lasting imprint on a generation of undergraduates. The soundness of the education they received has been demonstrated by the success of its graduates, not only in essentially intellectual vocations but in the mundane realm of business and government.

But, upon Hutchins's departure, his successor set about undoing the changes that had made the college unique. Hutchins was not surprised. He wrote to F. Champion Ward, the dean who resigned when the independent status of the faculty was rescinded: "My mistake was that I thought I was a successful evangelist, when I was actually the stopper in the bathtub. I thought I had convinced everybody when all I had done was block a return to 'normalcy.' "

The experiment was allowed to lapse, even though many of Hutchins's peers, including John Dewey, agreed with his charges that the contemporary educational system lacked unity of aim, material, and method; was burdened with an overloaded and congested curriculum; and engaged in narrow vocational training without proper grounding in the liberal arts. "If the criticisms are valid," Hutchins told his faculty, "some way of meeting them must be found. You are not relieved of the responsibility of finding it by saying that you don't like mine."

Here Hutchins encountered the besetting problem posed by the ingrained diffusion of authority and responsibility in the existing academic structure. The objectivity presumed to be guaranteed by tenure ebbs when a faculty deals with matters affecting its own disciplines. The professor, Hutchins noted early on, has "vested interests, personal ambitions, and ancient habits, all of which he wishes consciously or otherwise to protect. Every great change in American education has been secured over the dead bodies of countless professors."

Much has changed in higher education in the half century since Hutchins presided at Chicago, but the conditions that doomed his effort to reform undergraduate education have not. The key passages of President Donald Kennedy's recent "state of the university" address at Stanford might have been taken from Hutchins's annual reports to his trustees and faculty:

"Teaching and research are both important. But the relative emphasis has shifted over time, as the relatively new term research university suggests. It is time for us to reaffirm that education—that is, teaching in all its forms—is the primary task, and that our society will judge us in the long run on how well we do it. . . .

"We are told by many faculty and staff members that our community is losing some things we value: a feeling of collegiality, a pace that is hospitable to reflection, an informal kind of comfort with one another. . . . We can make the university a more focused and efficient place, with a more human scale, if we can agree to do without certain things."

Kennedy went on to suggest that the "publish or perish" doctrine that determines faculty promotions ought to be reconsidered. But Thomas Wascow, dean of undergraduate studies, noted that this would require "a change in faculty culture, and it's a culture that's not local to Stanford. It may take a change in the criteria to decide tenure at Stanford."

Most reviewers of *Unseasonable Truths* have pondered why Hutchins, a man of great natural gifts and obvious merit, left no lasting imprint on the educational system. My answer, as the title of the book implies, is that he could not prevail against the spirit of an increasingly self-centered age. The important questions posed by his notable career are whether the issues he raised are pertinent, and, if so, whether we can expect the present generation of educational administrators to address them.

HARRY S. ASHMORE
Santa Barbara, California

The Ph.D. Squid

During Theodore Ziolkowski's incisive discussion in "The Ph.D. Squid" (THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, Spring 1990), which borrows its central metaphor from William James's 1903 essay, "The Ph.D. Octopus," Ziolkowski speculates that "the image may have occurred to James because in 1899, much of which he spent in England, an unusual plague of octopi off the southern coast of England attracted a good deal of public attention." I would like to offer an alternative, literary source for James's famous image: Frank Norris's novel *The Octopus*, a realist treatment of the struggle in California between the strong wheat farmers and the mighty railroad companies during the late nineteenth century.

The Octopus was published in 1901, two years before James's essay, and was considered by many reviewers at the time one of the finest books of the year. Norris used the octopus as a symbol of the railroad's far-reaching power: "The huge tentacles went silently twisting and advancing, spreading out

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in every direction, sapping the strength of all opposition, quiet, gradual, biding the time to reach up and out and grip with a sudden unleashing of gigantic strength." Like his contemporary William Dean Howells, another reviewer of the excesses of the Gilded Age who liked to make connections between seemingly disparate disciplines like literature and business (in novels like *A Hazard of New Fortunes* and essays like "The Man of Letters as the Man of Business"), James would have enjoyed applying Norris's mercantile metaphor to criticize the faults of the academy. After all, an ironic reversal like that fits perfectly with the message of James's essay, that the university had been taken over by "the Doctor-Monopoly in teaching" and the degree itself merely an "advertising resource."

RICHARD BADENHAUSEN
Brookline, Massachusetts

In his otherwise thorough history of Ph.D. programs in this country ("The Ph.D. Squid," Spring 1990), Professor Ziolkowski neglected to mention the extent to which foreign language requirements, especially in the humanities, have been perceived as a roadblock to weed out doctoral candidates.

In the 1950s, when I was involved in graduate studies, Ph.D. candidates in English would spend incredible amounts of time reviewing French and German syntax in order to translate successfully passages in these languages that were often unnecessarily complex. Yet, few of these people would ever be called upon to go to these languages in their research and teaching.

It would have been useful if Professor Ziolkowski had assessed the impact that the requirement of Ph.D. candidates to translate difficult passages in foreign languages has had on the large number of graduate school drop-outs.

ERNEST V. CRAWFORD
Washington, D.C.

Multiculturalism

Diane Ravitch's "Multiculturalism" (Summer 1990) is a real thought-stimulator and alarm bell for all Americans regardless of their ethnic roots. Having said that, I add that my own reaction to it was perhaps somewhat ambivalent—in part dubious, in part in strongest agreement.

I have lived a long time. My life has spanned the dominance of the melting pot theory, the rise and general acceptance of multiculturalism, and the emergence of ethnocentric particularism. Through all of this I have felt and still strongly feel that the melting pot term best describes the forces of assimilation that have made and molded our country.

I can make my views clearest through a personal word and interpretation. My paternal grandparents were German-born. So were my mother's maternal grandparents. On my mother's paternal side I am of English descent, apparently long-established in America, but it is a lineage about which I know next to nothing. On the other hand, my ties with my relatives in Germany are close and go back to the decade after World War I. But I am American—not German-American. No hyphens for me, please. My parents were both insistently American. My father refused to learn or speak any German at home.

Perhaps my orientation and my feelings and outlook can best be illustrated by a personal anecdote from the Berlin of 1941, when I was serving in the American Embassy there. A German cousin, a manufacturer (and, I am glad to add, a strong anti-Nazi) sat with me one night in a Berlin hotel's air raid shelter during a British air attack. He had the misfortune to say to me, "But, Perry, you do feel yourself to be a German, don't you?" Helped by a sudden rush of adrenalin, my faulty German managed to express in a very fluent manner that, "Yes, Wilhelm, my blood is German. But my citizenship is American and my heart is American and my culture is English!" The last, under the circumstances, was an inspired hit that put that subject to sleep forever between us! Neither my German relatives, nor my English and other foreign friends, have ever been able quite to understand why I felt and feel that way.

I say I am American, with no ifs, buts, or hyphens, and it is because of the melting pot and the accompanying forces that assimilation exerted upon me. I am not ashamed of my German blood. I greatly value the good things I see in it. But I am part of this great new nation of America. Multicultural it may now be—and no one can deny that. But upon what base does it all rest, upon what was it built? Undeniably, it is an American nation built upon British foundations. Why should anyone want to deny that? I strongly affirm it.

Those British foundations are at least six in number: (1) our common language, English; (2) a history that evolved out of the history of the British Isles and no other; (3) a legal system that everywhere except in Louisiana is based upon British justice and the common law of England; (4) political ideas and institutions, modified, to be sure, but clearly patterned after the British model; (5) a literary heritage that is British to the core; and (6) social ideals whose roots lie in Britain. Our roots as a nation, our patrimony as a people, do not go back to Germany or Italy or France or Poland or Africa or Arabia or India or China or Japan. They go straight back without question to Britain.

Why mask this fact? Why resent this fact? Upon this very definite foundation, we have built a new

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nation, a new culture, a new society. Many rich and new elements have gone into the melting pot. A lot of added spices have gone into the soup, to alter the metaphor. Multiversity and uniqueness have come out of it. But the soup stock is and always will be British. Blood, skin color, slant of eyes, ancestry, and geography—none of these can change that fact. Nor can I see why anyone should resent that fact or seek to make non-history out of it, as the ethnocentric particularists do. Without it, we wouldn't be a nation. Multicultural? Yes, but growing from a definite and precise cultural root. This is the only point I really want to make about Professor Ravitch's "multiculturalism" thesis.

When multiculturalism degenerates into ethnocentric particularism, I support Professor Ravitch every inch of the way. Only disaster can come from rejecting the plain fact of our Eurocentrism (or, more accurately, Anglocentrism) and attempting to return in any pure way to the history, languages, food, names, dress, and achievements of our genetic ancestors. This way lies eventual dissolution and chaos for the united nation we have built in America. If I have any quarrel with multiculturalism or excessive stress thereon, it is simply because I perceive it as a fertile breeding ground for ethnocentric particularism. Let us stress and prize our commonality, which is a mixture of diversities on a common foundation.

In the words of that forgotten patriotic song, "Hail Columbia, happy land!"

PERRY LAUKHUFF
Amherst, Virginia

Quiet—Author Suffering

I reluctantly applaud Bruce Bawer's review of Annie Dillard's *The Writing Life* (THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, Summer 1990)—reluctantly because I have felt compelled to cultivate the work of an author embraced by Wesleyan University, my alma mater. Also, following the publication of *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, I lived for eight years in the foothills of the Blue Ridge, chatting on occasion with Annie Dillard's former husband Richard at Hollins College. But such inducements have failed, finally, to endear me to the author. Bruce Bawer has said what needs to be said.

CLAUDE CLAYTON SMITH
Ohio Northern University
Ada, Ohio

Mr. Mencken and the Jews

Sheldon L. Richman, in defending H. L. Mencken against charges of anti-Semitism (THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, Summer 1990), says that Mencken attended a school where Hebrew was taught and there "picked up such Hebrew words, which he used regularly, as *tokos, schlemihl,* and *mashuggah.*" Those words, which would not be taught in any school and which Mencken probably picked up in the street, are Yiddish, not Hebrew. Yiddish is a form of medieval German that came to be a lingua franca among Jews. Hebrew is a language unto itself dating from the most ancient days.

LAWRENCE R. ENO
New York, New York

SHELDON L. RICHMAN replies: It takes real chutzpah (from the late Hebrew) to challenge H. L. Mencken on matters of language. In *Happy Days,* Mencken wrote, "He [the schoolmaster F. Knapp] was also fond of using a number of Hebrew-loan words, for example, *tokos* (backside), *schlemihl* (oaf), *kosher* (clean), and *mashuggah* (crazy), most of which have since come into American." Although in *The American Language* Mencken calls these words Yiddishisms, there is no contradiction because, as *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language,* second edition unabridged, notes, they all originated in Hebrew before entering Yiddish and then English.

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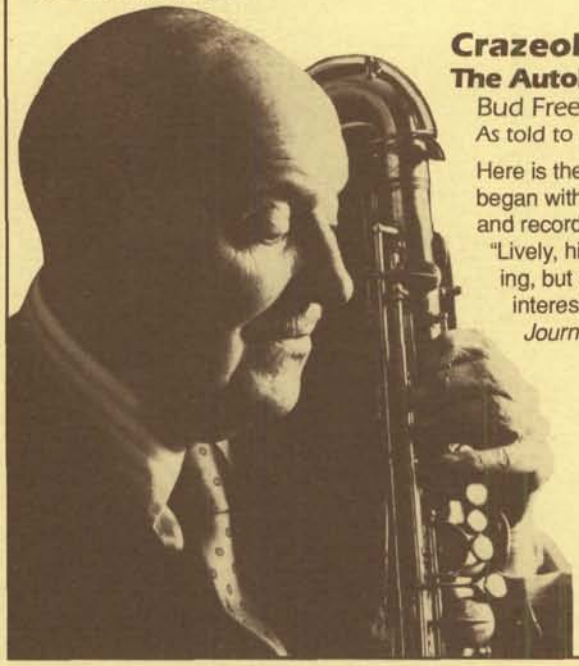

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